


SPIRITUAL STORIES OF INDIA

COMPILED AND EDITED BY
CHAMAN LAL





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Compiled and edited by
CHAMAN LAL

Illustrations by
P. KHEMRAJ



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PREFACE

Ernest Rhys in his introduction to the *Fables, Aesop and Others* justly remarks: "We have to admit that the best fables did not begin with Aesop or in Greece at all. We have, in fact, to go East and look into India and burrow in the 'tales within tales' of *Hitopadesa* to get an idea how old the antiquity of the fables actually is."

When God made the world, He gave many virtues to different nations. To India He gave wisdom as a special gift. The *Upanishads* are India's books of wisdom. The stories presented in this book are full of wisdom. They illustrate what miracles can be wrought with faith in God. They tell us what we can learn from nature, what tolerance and love can bring to humanity. Every story is full of lessons. In these days of fear and atomic madness stories of faith in God would invest every reader with indomitable courage.

I had originally collected and translated some of these stories for my own guidance, since a monk is one who tries to improve himself. I claim no credit: I have simply performed the task of a bee that collects honey from fragrant flowers.

I shall be happy if this publication can help even a few thousand young people to learn some lessons in wisdom to become God-fearing ideal citizens of the world.

I deem it my duty to thank the distinguished authors or publishers whose stories I have included in this collection. I am specially thankful for the permission to reproduce stories translated from the *Bhagavata* by Swami Prabhavananda of Vedanta Society of Southern California.

CHAMAN LAL

GLORY OF TRUTH

THERE was a truthful king whose mind was given to piety. If any common man who brought to his capital cereals, textile goods or any other commodity for sale failed to dispose of them by sunset, the king used to buy them. Such was the unfailing vow undertaken by the king for the public weal. Immediately after the sunset the king's servants went round the city and if they found anyone sitting with some saleable commodity they made inquiries of him, and after paying a price to his satisfaction would purchase the whole stock.

In order to put to a test the love for truth of that truthful monarch, on a certain day, Dharma (the god of piety) himself appeared in his capital in the guise of a Brahmin, carrying with him a box containing useless household articles fit for throwing away as rubbish, and sat down in the bazaar as a vendor. But who was going to buy rubbish ? When the evening shades fell, the king's men went about the city on their usual round. All the goods that had been brought for sale to the city had been sold. This Brahmin alone was found sitting with his box. The king's men approached him and inquired whether his commodity had been sold. On his replying in the negative, the king's men further asked him what article he had brought for sale in that box and what its price was. The Brahmin replied that the box contained nothing but rubbish, and that its price was one thousand rupees! At this the king's men laughed and said, "Who will buy this rubbish which is not worth even a paisa ?" The Brahmin coolly replied, "If no one buys it, I shall take it back to my home." The king's men sought audience with His Majesty at once and reported the matter to him. Thereupon the king instructed them not to let the man take his things back, and insisted on their purchasing his things after rendering satisfaction to him by paying him a little more or less.

The king's men forthwith returned and offered to the Brahmin a sum of two hundred rupees by way of price for his commodity. The Brahmin, however, refused to accept even a paisa less than one thousand rupees. The king's servants raised their offer to the limit of five hundred rupees, but the Brahmin declined it. Enraged at this stubborn behaviour of the Brahmin, some of the king's men returned to the king and complained to him that the Brahmin's box did not contain anything but rubbish which was not worth even a paisa, yet the Brahmin was not going to part with his things even for full five hundred rupees. They were therefore of the opinion that his articles need not be purchased at all. The king, however, reminded them of his unfailing vow, which he was not prepared to go back upon on any account, and commanded them to purchase the Brahmin's box for any price which the Brahmin might choose to demand. The king's servants laughed at this tenacity of their master and returned to the Brahmin. They had no alternative but to pay one thousand rupees to the Brahmin in exchange for his rubbish. The Brahmin took the amount and gladly departed, while the king's men brought the box to the king's presence. The king for his part had the box placed in his own palace.

The same night, when it was bedtime, an extremely beautiful young lady, finely dressed and richly adorned, issued out of the main gate of the palace. The king was sitting in the outer chamber. Seeing the belle, the king approached her and inquired who she was, what had brought her there and why she was going away. The young lady told him that she was no other than Lakshmi (the goddess of fortune) and that, since he was a truthful and pious monarch she had from the very outset been residing at his house. She, however, found that poverty had since entered its portals in the form of rubbish. She was therefore loth to remain at a place where poverty resided, she added, and hence she was leaving the king's palace that very day. The king, however, did not interfere and allowed her to have her way.

Shortly afterwards the king saw a most handsome youth going out of the palace. He put the same question to the youth. At this the latter replied that he was the god of charity, and had been residing in his palace from the very beginning since he was a

truthful and pious monarch. He further told the king that he was leaving for the same place to which Lakshmi had gone; for when Lakshmi had forsaken his palace the king had no wherewithal left with him to practise charity. The king said, "Go, if you must!"

Later on, another handsome male figure was seen coming out of the palace. On his being questioned likewise he told the king that he was *morality incarnate* and that, as he was a truthful and virtuous monarch, he had been living in his palace ever since he had assumed the reins of government. Since, however, Lakshmi and the god of charity had both left his residence he was following suit; for in the absence of Lakshmi and Charity the king would not be able to preserve his morality intact. The king said, "Very well!"

After some time another youthful figure appeared at the entrance of the palace. Interrogated by the king, he replied that he was *fame incarnate* and had been living in his palace ever since he ascended the throne. He added that since Lakshmi, Charity and Morality had all left his palace his fame could not endure in their absence. Hence he, too, was going the same way. The king kept quiet and allowed him to go.

Still later, another youth came out of the palace. He, too, repeated the same story when accosted by the monarch. He told the king that he was *veracity incarnate* and had stayed in his palace since the very beginning of his reign. Since however, Lakshmi, Charity, Morality and Fame had all departed from his palace, he also was following them. The king told the youth that it was for his sake that he had allowed all those deities mentioned by him to go their way. Since, however, he had never forsaken truthfulness the latter should not in all fairness desert him. The king explained to him that in the interest of public good he had taken a solemn vow to the effect that should anyone bring any commodity for sale to his capital and fail to dispose it of before sunset he would purchase the whole stock that remained. The king further said to Truthfulness, "This very day a Brahmin brought for sale some rubbish which was not worth even a paisa; but it was for vindicating the cause of truth alone that I purchased that symbol of indigence for one thousand rupees." "Lakshmi,"

continued the king, "thereupon appeared before me and told me that since poverty had taken up her abode in my palace, she was loth to reside with me. For this very reason Lakshmi and all the rest of her company have left me one after another. On your strength alone, nevertheless, I stand firm in my - vow." Truthfulness changed his mind when he came to know that it was for the sake of truth alone that the monarch had allowed all those deities to depart. He, therefore, decided to stay and returned to the palace.

Shortly afterwards Fame returned to the king and, on being questioned by the latter, told him who he was, and added that however morally correct and munificent and wealthy a man might be, he could not attain real celebrity without truthfulness. He further told him about his decision to stay where Truthfulness was. The king welcomed his decision.

Morality was the next to make his appearance before the king. On being accosted by the latter, he told him who he was, and added that morality stayed only where veracity existed. However charitable-minded and opulent one might be, morality was out of the question where truthfulness was lacking. Morality further told him that since truthfulness was present in the king he had made up his mind to return to him. The king welcomed him back into the palace.

Charity also shortly returned. On being interrogated by the king, he told the latter who he was, and added that charity abided only where truthfulness was present. However rich one might be, he could not be expected to be munificent unless he was devoted to truth. The visitor complimented the king on the latter's respect for truth and further told him that he had accordingly decided to return to him. The king said, "So be it!" and welcomed him back into the palace.

Then came Dharma (God of Justice) himself disguised in the form of the selfsame Brahmin. On being questioned in the same way, he told the king that he was no other than the god of piety, and that it was he who had sold the rubbish to the king for one thousand rupees. The stranger further confessed that he had been

won over by the king by virtue of his truthfulness and had called on him in person to grant him a boon of his choice. He therefore pressed the monarch to tell him of what service he could be to His Majesty. The king, however, merely expressed his gratitude to the deity and said that he wanted nothing.

From the foregoing parable it will be clear beyond doubt that where there is truthfulness all blessings are invariably present. Even if wealth, charity, morality and fame are found wanting in a votary of this virtue at any time, he should not become disheartened. If truthfulness is strictly adhered to, all these are sure to return of their own accord. Even if they do not, he will have nothing to lose; on the other hand, the highest gain will be his. Hence the seeker of blessedness must not forsake truthfulness on any account... Rather he should firmly adhere to it in a disinterested spirit without fail.

TRUTHFULNESS : Speaking the truth and cultivation of noble virtues and right conduct make up what they call Truthfulness. The Lord says in the *Gita*:

"The name of God, SAT, is employed in the sense of truth and goodness. And the word SAT is also used in the sense of praiseworthy action, Arjuna. And steadfastness in sacrifice, austerity and charity is likewise spoken of as SAT; and action for the sake of God is invariably termed as SAT.

"There is a popular saying in Hindi, which can be translated as follows :

"Truthfulness must not be given up on any account, O servant of God ! Your credit is sure to be lost in the event of your forsaking Truth. Fortune held fast by truthfulness will come to you again (if temporarily lost)."

—Translated from the *KALYAN*

THE ORDEAL OF SITA

RAMA'S whole heart was filled with the longing to see Sita, and renew once more the life-sweetness which had been broken that morning when he left her to catch the golden deer. Yet he was no mere mortal, full of blind impulse, a prey to the chance-born desires of the passing moment. He foresaw that if their reunion was to be secure, it must take place in public and must be accompanied by some proof of his wife's honour and devotion which could never be shaken in the popular mind. There could be no happiness for Sita if her subjects did not love her and trust her implicitly. There could be none for him if her name were not lifted high above the stain of suspicion or reproach.

But the first duty that awaited him had nothing to do with these questions. He was at this moment at the head of a conquering army. His first responsibility lay in protecting the city, with its women, its children, and its treasures, from his own forces. He hastened, therefore, to crown and proclaim Vibhishana King of Lanka. This done, he called Hanuman secretly, and bidding him obtain the permission of the new King to enter the city, sent him to Sita to acquaint her privately with his victory. Publicly he professed a formal request to Vibhishana that he would personally escort the Queen of Koshala to his presence. She was to come, moreover, wearing the robes and jewels proper to occasions of state. The loving heart of the woman would have prompted her to fly to the shelter of her husband just as she was, in the mourning garments of her captivity. But Vibhishana reminded her gently of the sacredness of a husband's expressed wish, and she submitted immediately to the tiring which this imposed. Hard, verily, are the roads that princes walk! Treading at each step on her own heart, must Sita make her way to her husband's side.

At last the Queen was ready and entered the closed palanquin, with its hangings of scarlet and gold, in which she would be borne into the presence of Rama, Vibhishana himself riding before her to announce her coming. At the city gates, however, came the request that she should alight and proceed through the open camp on foot. Scarcely understanding, and so absorbed in the thought of seeing the King that she had little care for any minor detail, Sita rose from her seat in the covered litter and stepped out on the broad road. Round her, to right and left, were the soldiery. In front was seated Rama, in full audience, with grave and solemn air. All eyes were on Sita, who had never, since her childhood to this hour, been seen in public. Instinctively the knightly Vibhishana realised the embarrassment this must cause to the shrinking and sensitive Queen, and he was in the act of ordering the dispersal of the crowds so as to leave the meeting of the royal pair unwitnessed, when Rama put up his hand and stopped him. "Let all stay !" he commanded. "This is one of those occasions when the whole universe becomes the veil of woman, and she may be seen by all without sin!"

Nearer and nearer came Sita meanwhile, with slow and regal step. Her eyes were drinking in every line, every movement of her husband's face. He rose to receive her; but all men saw that he looked not towards her, but stood with head bowed and downward-gazing eyes. How beautiful was the Queen ! How stately and full of grace she looked ! And yet, decked as she was in royal ornaments, there was that about her which spoke more plainly still, assuring all who looked on her that here was a woman of true and noble heart, a humble and loving wife, fit to be, as she was, the crown and support of all the happy homes throughout her land. Every man in the hosts that day held his breath in awe and reverence, at the revelation seen in her of what great womanhood should be.

At a sign from her husband, and a few paces away, the Queen stood still, and Rama looked up and addressed her in thick, constrained tones. "Ravana has been duly defeated and slain," he said. "Thus has the honour of Ayodhya been vindicated to the utmost. It is for the Queen, whom he separated from her husband,

to say in what guardianship, and with what establishment, she will now choose to live. Thy wishes, O gentle one!" he added, addressing her for a moment directly and swept away by his own tenderness, "shall be carried out in full. But it is not seemly or possible to restore to her old place one whose fair fame has been sullied by residence in the palace of Ravana."

At these words the Queen stood, in her sudden astonishment and pain, like one who had been stabbed. Then she raised her proud head to its proudest height, and, though her lips quivered and the tears fell, without her will, her wonderful voice rang out untremulous. "My character," she said, "must indeed be misconceived. Even Rama, it seems, can mistake my greatness, and truly then am I undone! Yet if my lord had but told me, while yet I was imprisoned in Lanka, that it was for the honour of Ayodhya he would recover me, I would indeed have spared him all his labours. How easy had it been to me to die there, only I supposed that other motives moved him ! Go, Lakshmana, and make for me here a funeral pyre ! Methinks that is the only remedy for the disaster that has come upon me."

This, then, was Sita's desire for guardians and establishment ! Lakshmana looked towards his brother in anger and surprise, but, receiving only a quiet gesture, hastened to have the funeral pyre prepared. The face of Rama was like that of Death himself in the hour of the final destruction of all things, and none present dared to speak to him. As for Sita, her tears were now raining down; but still she stood there, waiting patiently.

When the wood had been piled and the fire set blazing, Sita walked three times round her husband, standing in his place with head bowed, and it was evident to all that her heart was full of sweetness. Then, coming forward to the fire, and standing before it with her hands folded as for prayer, she said, "Do thou, O Fire, the witness of the worlds ! protect me, whose heart has been ever true! Take me to yourselves, O ye pure flames ! for unto the Lord of Purity the pure fleeth."

Saying this, and walking three times round the pyre, the Queen, having bidden farewell to the world with undaunted heart,

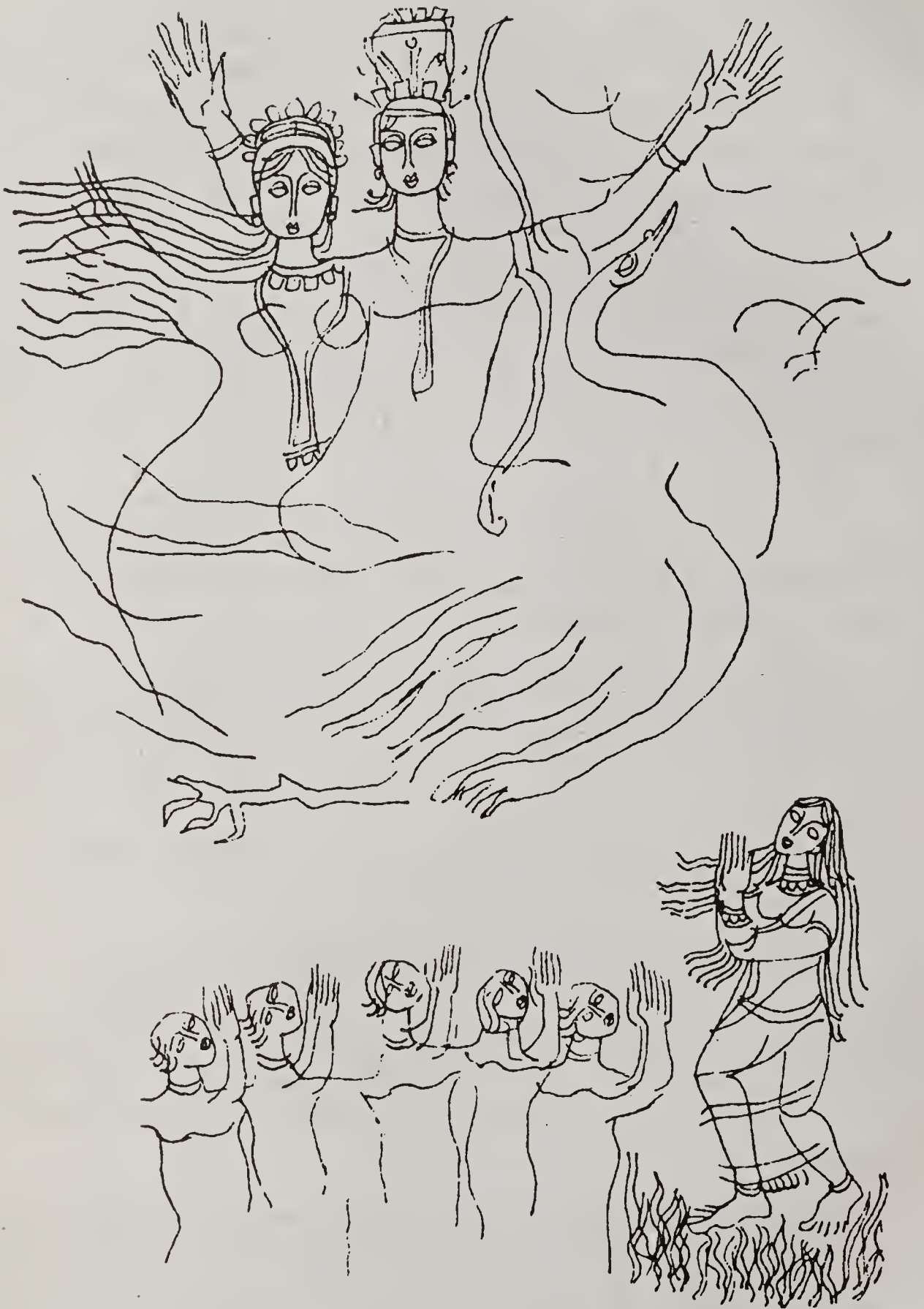
entered into it. Like gold being, set upon a golden altar was the stepping of Sita into that flaming fire. And lamentations arose on all sides from amongst the lookers-on. But lo, as her foot touched the pyre, voices of angelic sweetness were heard from heaven chanting the glory of Rama, and the mystery of the ineffable union of the Divine Being with His own divine grace. And there advanced from the heart of the fire to meet Sita, Agni, the God of Fire, himself. Supporting her with his right arm. and stepping out from amongst the flames, the divinity bore her forward to Rama whose face had suddenly become radiant with joy, and gave her to him, joining them together.

"She is thine own, O Rama !" he said; "she is thine own —ever faithful and true to thee, in thought, word, and deed. Lo, at my command is it that thou takest her back unto thee. For I have spoken, and she is thine own !"

And Rama said, receiving her, "Verily, my beloved, no doubt was in my mind concerning thee. Yet was thy vindication needful, in the presence of all our people. Truly art thou mine. Think not thou canst be divided from me. Thou art mine, and I could not renounce thee, even as the sun cannot be separated from his own rays."

And as they stood thus, wedded once more—as in their youth by man, so now by the God of Fire himself—it seemed to all present as if the gates of heaven were suddenly swung backward above them, and they saw Dasharatha, seated in his car, blessing Sita as well as Rama, and hailing them King and Queen of Ayodhya.

It was true that the fourteen years of their exile were ended, and as Rama understood from this vision that the soul of his father would not be in peace till his coronation was finally accomplished, he did everything that was possible to hasten their departure. A day or two passed, distributing wealth and rewards amongst the soldiers, and then mounting with Sita into the royal car, drawn by white swans, they coursed swiftly through the sky, and arrived at Ayodhya.



It is told of the days that followed that, with Rama governing that kingdom, widows were not distressed, nor was there fear from wild beasts or from disease. The people were safe from robbers, and there was no other trouble. The old were not called upon to perform the funeral ceremonies of the young. All were happy together, nor did they envy one another. And the trees bore

fruits and flowers perpetually. Showers fell whenever they were desired. And the winds blew pleasantly. And all men became pious and truthful under the rule of Rama, and his kingdom was blessed with all the marks of fortune.

How happy would have been the story if it had ended thus ! So did the great poet Valmiki intend it. And so for hundreds of years must men have known it. But in some later age, by an unknown hand, a sequel was written, and this sequel is strangely sad. It tells how the terrible ordeal of Sita had not after all been enough, or perhaps had taken place too far away, to satisfy her people. The murmuring and suspicion that Rama had foreseen, did, after all, break out; and when he heard this, the King knew that it was useless to fight against the inevitable, Sita and he must henceforth dwell apart. For the good of his subjects a king must be willing to make any sacrifices, and it could never, he felt, be for their well-being that their sovereign's conduct should be misunderstood. But though his will was thus heroic, Rama could not trust himself to see Sita and say his last goodbye to her, face to face. He sent her, therefore, in the care of Lakshmana, to make a long-desired pilgrimage to the hermitage of Valmiki, on the far side of the Ganges. There Lakshmana was to give his parting messages, and take farewell of her.

Oh how terrible was the desolation of Sita on this occasion ! There was, indeed, the consolation that she understood her husband, and he her. The last words of each for the other made this separation of theirs like the plighting of a solemn troth. Yet she knew that their parting was to be for ever. She would be always with him in spirit, but neither might hope to look upon the other's face again.

Twenty years passed in this retirement, under the guardianship of the wise and fatherly Valmiki, whom the twin sons of Sita regarded as a kind and beloved grandfather. But when twenty years had gone by, there came to Valmiki's hermitage the news of a royal sacrifice at Ayodhya. Now the saint had already composed *Ramayana*, and taught it to Lava and Kusha, the sons of Rama. He determined, therefore, to take the boys to Ayodhya and let them

sing the poem before their father, on the occasion of the sacrifice. Long before it was finished, Rama had realised that the lads before him must be his own. It took many days to chant the poem, but the King and his counsellors listened greedily to the end. Then, with a sigh, Rama turned to the great Valmiki and said, "Ah, if only Sita were here! But she could never consent to a second trial of her honour !"

"Let me ask her !" answered Valmiki, who longed, above all things, to bring this husband and wife together once more, for the happiness of both.

To the surprise of Rama, word was brought that Sita would consent next day to go through a second public trial, this time by oath instead of by the fiery ordeal.

The morning came. The King and all his ministers and attendants were seated in state, and vast crowds, of all ranks and from all parts of the country, were admitted to see the trial of Sita. In came the Queen, following Valmiki. Closely veiled, with her head bent, hands folded and tears in her eyes, she walked; and it was easy to see that all her mind was meditating upon Rama. A murmur of praise and delight broke from all the spectators. Little did any one there dream of what they would shortly see happen !

As Valmiki presented the Queen to Rama and to the assembly, and as Rama turned to call upon her to swear to her own faithfulness and sincerity, before all their people, every one noticed that a cool and fragrant breeze began to blow, as if betokening the nearness of the gods. No one, however, was prepared for the effect of Rama's words on Sita.

That proud, though gentle, soul had borne all that was possible for her. Perfect in sweetness and perfect in submission, she had endured twenty years of loneliness without murmuring. But all now had come to an end. "O divine Mother !" she cried, "thou great Earth-Goddess, if it be true that in my heart I have never thought of any other than Rama then for my wifely virtue take me to Thyself! If constantly, by thought, word, and deed, I have prayed for his welfare, then for this great virtue do Thou give me refuge !" And as the weary cry rang out, a wonderful thing

happened. The earth opened and a great jewelled throne rose up, carried on the heads of Nagas, lords of the underworld. On the throne sat the Earth-Goddess, stretching out her arms to take to herself this child of hers, who had cried to her for refuge; and celestial flowers rained upon both, as the throne re-entered the earth. At the same time voices were heard from the heavens, saying, "Glory, glory unto Sita!" And as the Queen and the Earth-Mother passed out of sight of men, the whole universe passed, for one moment, it is said, into a state of holy calm.

One heart, however, did not share this peace. The mind of Rama was torn with grief. And true as Sita had been to him, so true was he ever after unto her. For the performance of those ceremonies in which the help of a queen was necessary, he had a golden image made of his wife, and went through his official actions by its side. So passed all things, until that hour had struck, beyond which no man may delay, and when that came, Rama and his brothers bade farewell to the world, and going out of Ayodhya to the river-side, they entered into their divine bodies, and were seen no more in the world of men.

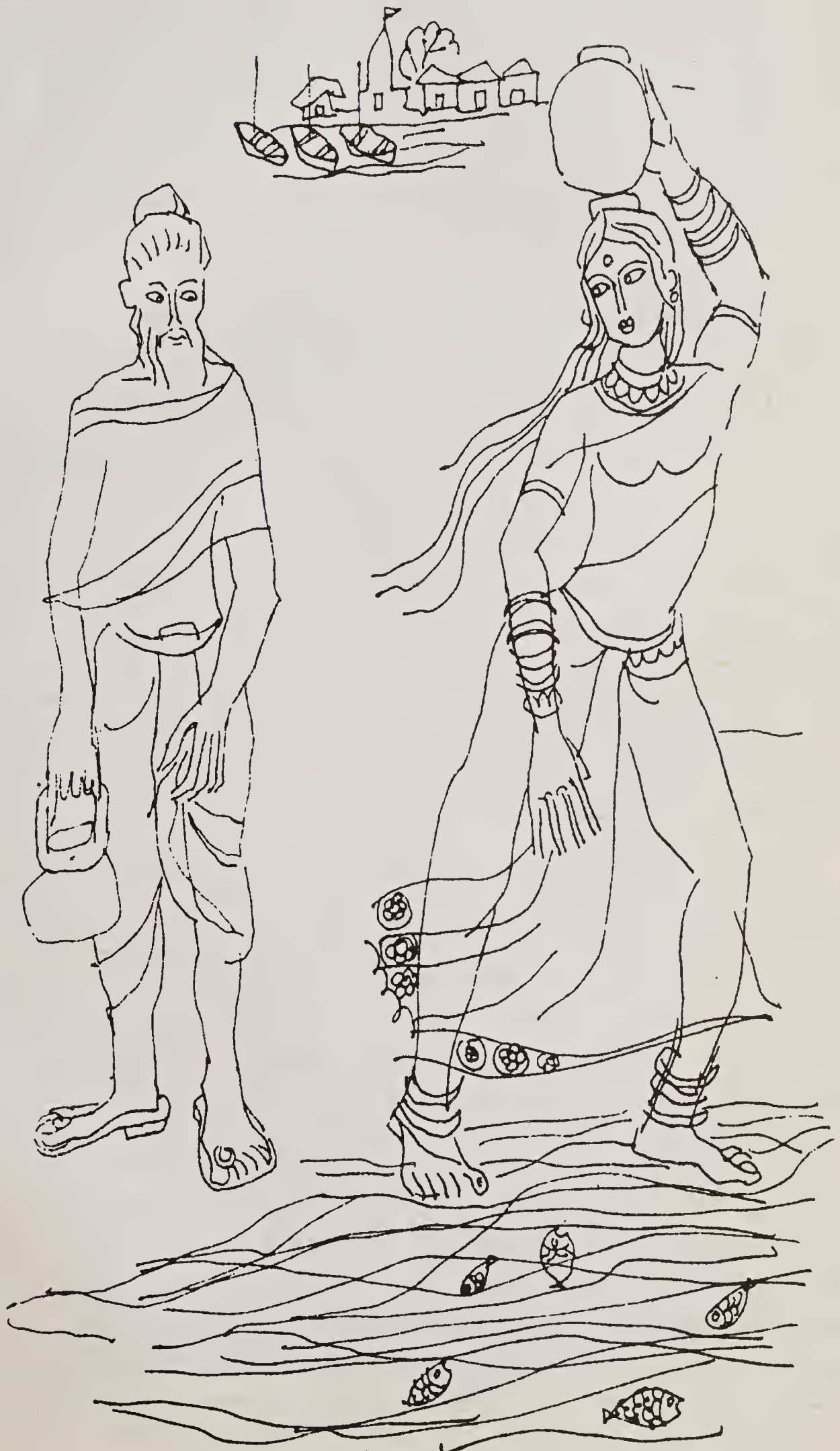
And ages passed by, and the story of their days became a memory, for there were none left on the earth, of all those who had lived beneath their sway.

—SISTER NIVEDITA

FAITH, DEVOTION AND RESIGNATION

A MILK-MAID used to supply milk to a Brahmin priest living on the other side of a river. Owing to the irregularities of the boat service, she could not supply him milk punctually every day. Once, being rebuked for her coming late, the poor woman said, "What can I do ? I start early from my house, but have to wait for a long time at the riverbank for the boatman and the passengers." The priest said, "Woman! They cross the ocean of life by uttering the name of God, and can't you cross this little river ?" The simple-hearted woman became very glad at heart on learning this easy means of crossing the river. From the next day the milk was supplied in the morning. One day the priest said to the woman, "How is it that you are no longer late nowadays ?" She said, "I cross the river by uttering the name of the Lord as you told me to do, and I don't stand now in need of a boatman." The priest could not believe this and said, "Can you show me how you cross the river ?" The woman took him with her and began to walk over the water. Looking behind, the woman saw the priest in a sad plight and said, "How is it, Sir, that you are uttering the name of God with your mouth, but at the same time with your hands you are trying to keep your cloth untouched by water? You do not fully rely on Him." Entire resignation and absolute faith in God are at the root of all miraculous deeds.

—SRI RAMAKRISHNA



TEACHERS IN ANCIENT INDIA

IN ancient India, the relation of a teacher to a student was that of a father to a son. The teacher was called 'Guru', and the students had to live with him in his house. The teacher had the choice to accept or reject a boy as his pupil. If he did not like it, he could refuse to take him as his student. Hence once a student was taken up, the Guru or the preceptor was everything to him. The pupil had to obey him implicitly with devotion. Sometimes, the preceptors used to test the devotion of their pupils. The pupils had not to pay anything to their preceptors. On the other hand, it was the teacher who used to provide them with all the necessities of life. At the end of their period of study, they had to do something for their preceptor in token of their gratitude. This was called *guru-dakshina*. There is a story in the *Mahabharata*, which illustrates this point.

Acharya Drona was the preceptor of the princes of Hastinapura. His fame spread far and wide. There were at the time a very low caste people called Nisadas. They lived by hunting. The king of the Nisadas had an only son named Ekalavya. The little boy heard of Drona and wanted to be his pupil. So he left home and went to Hastinapura. He begged Drona to accept him as his pupil. But Drona rejected him on account of his low birth. With a heavy heart, the young boy left the place. He did not return home, but went to the forest. There he wandered about, found a secluded spot and placing an image of Drona began to practise archery. Days, months and years rolled on. The boy still stayed there practising the art. One day in the course of hunting, Drona with his favourite pupil Arjuna came that way. The dogs chased a deer and followed its track. They came near the spot where Ekalavya, with a concentrated mind, was practising archery. The barking of the dogs disturbed him. He looked at the dogs and taking his bow

and arrows shot a few of them. The dogs became silent. They were deprived of the power of barking. They returned mute to their masters. Drona and Arjuna were surprised to see them in that condition. Who can be this skilled archer who has so effectively shot these arrows ? Whoever he may be, he is superior even to Arjuna, the favourite pupil of Drona. They began to search for him. The dogs led them and they followed. At last the dogs stopped at the spot where a young man of dark complexion, with matted hair, and dirty and torn clothes, was sitting before the image of Drona and practising archery with a concentrated mind. Drona went up to him and asked him, "Who are you ?"



"My name is Ekalavya," said the young man.

"I am surprised at your skill in archery. Who is your teacher?" Drona asked.

"You are my teacher," replied Ekalavya.

Drona was bound by a promise to Arjuna that he would make him his best pupil on the condition that Arjuna would help him to avenge an insult done to him by King Drupada. He now saw that his promise was at stake. This youth had surpassed Arjuna in the skill of arms. But Drona must abide by his promise at any cost. So he turned to Ekalavya and said, "If I am your teacher, give me my fee, *guru-dakshina*, as you have now completed your work and have become a skilled archer."

"Order me, master. I will give you whatever you want."

This was just what Ekalavya wanted : to make Drona recognise him as his pupil. Drona said, "Then, give me the thumb of your right hand."

This terrible order of the master did not unnerve him. He knew that without his thumb he would not be able to use the art he had acquired at such a cost. Still, with an unflinching heart, he took up a sharp knife and cutting off his thumb at one stroke, placed it at the feet of Drona, saying "Here it is, my master."

Such was the devotion with which students served their teachers in ancient India.

Student: I think the teachers were sometimes very harsh and cruel.

Teacher : Yes, they were. In the above story, Drona was bound by a promise; so he had no other way.

—DR. SHAKUNTALA RAO SHASTRI

THE LEGEND OF PRAHLADA

HIRANYAKASIPU, the king of the Daityas, having got a boon from Brahma that he could not be slain by man or beast, made himself so powerful in all the three worlds by his violence that he could not brook the idea of an Almighty God ruling this universe. He looked upon all those who believed in God as his enemies. His enslaved subjects were so afraid of his tyranny that they worshipped him as God and gave up all their religious usages. All their temples were destroyed and their scriptures burnt. By a royal decree religion was forbidden to be taught in any home or school. No citizen could, save on pain of death, mention the name of God to his children. Throughout the kingdom, the agents of Hiranyakasipu encouraged in his subjects the belief that there was no power on earth or in heaven higher than their king.

Hiranyakasipu had a son Prahlada by name. The boy was sent to a teacher's house to be educated. He lived there for some years and was instructed in all the arts befitting a prince of his rank. While his education was still going on, he once paid a visit to his father along with his teacher. He duly bowed before his father's feet and was bidden to rise and give the substance of what he had learnt so far.

"This is the substance, O father, of all that I have learnt," said Prahlada. "I have learnt to adore Him who is without beginning, middle or end—the imperishable Lord of the world, the Universal First Cause."

On hearing these words the king of the Daityas sprang up from his seat, his eyes red with anger and his lips quivering with emotion. He turned to the teacher and asked him in thundering tones why he had taught his boy to utter such nonsense.

"O King of the Daityas, " replied the teacher, "do not give way to passion. That which your son has uttered has not been taught by me. I am as much surprised as you are at what he has said."

Hiranyakasipu now turned to the lad and demanded : "By whom then have you been taught this vile lesson ? Your teacher here denies that he has taught it."

"The God of gods, O father," answered Prahlada, "is the instructor of the whole world. His teaching is there on rocks and trees, in the sky and the ocean, and, most of all, in the face of man."

"Is this boy mad ?" exclaimed Hiranya and shaking him fiercely by his shoulders demanded once more : "Who is this God of gods whom you so impertinently mention before me —me who am the sovereign of the three worlds ?"

"The glory of that God cannot be described," answered Prahlada fearlessly. "It is only to be meditated upon by the devout. He is the Supreme Lord. All things proceed from Him and abide in Him."

"Are you desirous of death, you fool," thundered his father, "that you dare give the title of Supreme Lord to any one other than me, while I am here ?"

"The Almighty God is the creator, protector and destroyer of all beings," gently stated Prahlada. "He is the Lord of all—even of you, father. Why should you be offended ?"

The king of the Daityas then exclaimed, "What evil spirit has entered the heart of this silly boy that he thus, like a man possessed, utters these profane words before me ?"

"Not into my heart alone," answered his son, "but into the hearts of all has the great God entered. He pervades us all. It is by His power that we live and move, that we think and speak—you as well as I."

"Away with this wretch," cried Hiranya, unable to bear it any longer. "Take him away to his preceptor's house. And let the preceptor come and see me again. I won't speak to him now."

According to the commands of the king, Prahlada was conducted back to the house of his preceptor. He lived there and, though he was not taught anything about God, progressed daily in his knowledge of Him. After a considerable time had elapsed, Hiranyakasipu sent for him again, and on his arrival asked him to recite any good verses he had learnt. Prahlada immediately recited the following :

"May He from whom all that moves and all that moves not originates, He who is the cause of all this creation, both animate and inanimate,—may He, the God of gods, be gracious unto us !"

On hearing these words, Hiranyakasipu exclaimed : "Kill this wretch. He does not deserve to live. He is growing worse and worse. He is a disgrace to my family, and a traitor to my kingdom."

Obedient to the king's orders his attendants rushed on the prince, threatening him with their flashing swords. But Prahlada looked on them calmly and said: "As the God of gods, O Daityas, is present in these weapons of yours, as well as in my body, they cannot hurt me."

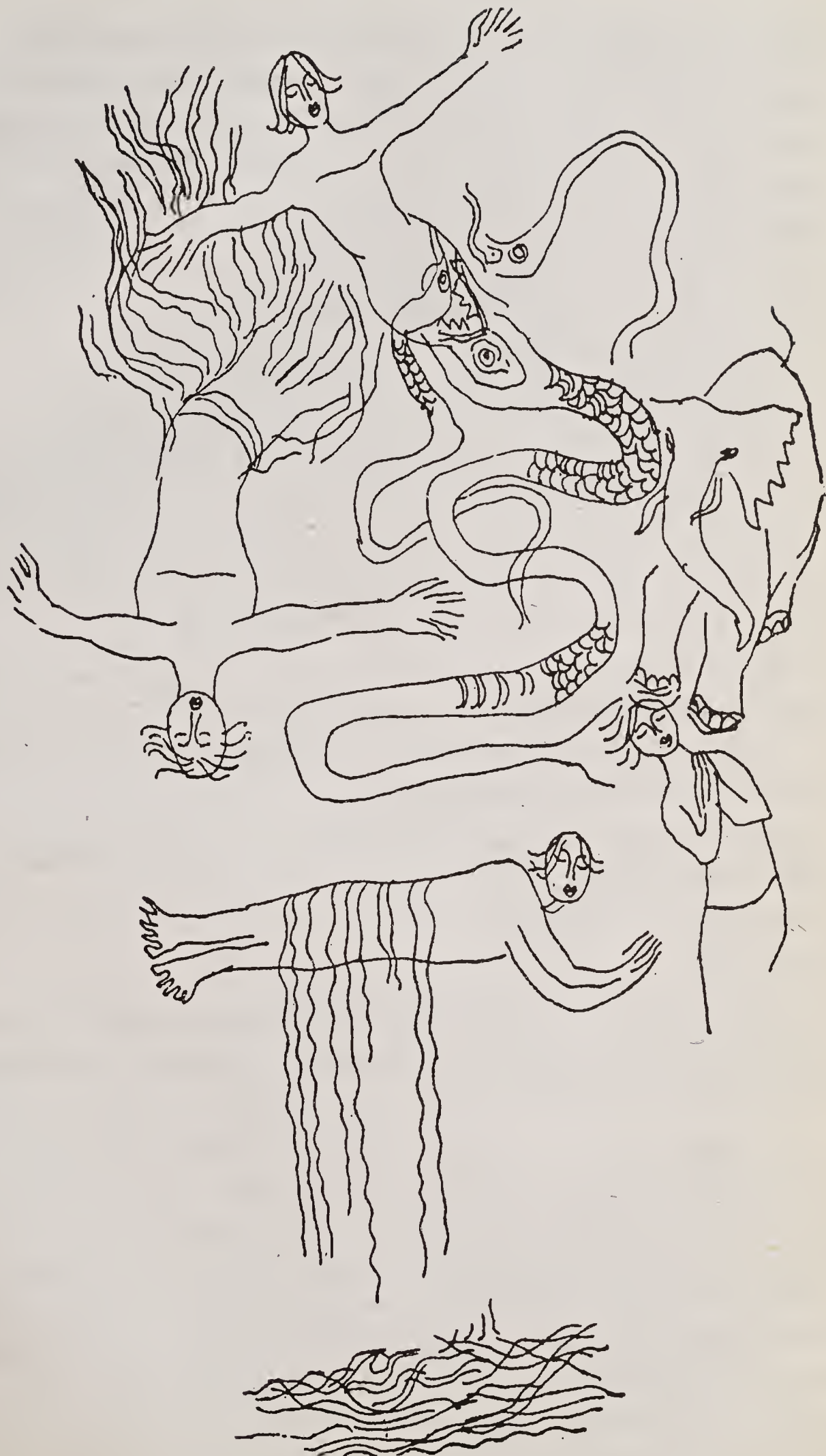
"Let us see," said Hiranyakasipu to himself and drew his sword and struck the prince. Prahlada did not feel the least pain. The King's sword failed to give him even a scratch. Hiranyakasipu was enraged and struck his son repeatedly, but failed to produce any impression on his son's body. He then tried to persuade Prahlada to refrain from glorifying Him whom he called the God of gods and said that, if he should be so foolish as to persevere, he would be subjected to unendurable tortures. But his son replied that he felt no fear, because the immortal guardian of the lowly and the helpless resided in his heart.

Hiranyakasipu was exasperated at this reply and cried : "Put this wretch in chains and convey him to a dungeon. Let him await my pleasure there." Prahlada was accordingly led away in chains and thrown into a dark dungeon. The tyrant could not brook a traitor in his own family. If his son rebelled against him and set aside his orders, his rule would be in constant peril. The danger must be nipped in the bud. Else it might spread over the whole

kingdom and result in his overthrow. So he suppressed every trace of natural feeling in himself and began to devise gruesome tortures which would bring the young rebel to his senses. The old books say that Hiranyakasipu gave orders that Prahlada be thrown among poisonous serpents, trampled upon by furious elephants and scorched to death by raging flames till he yielded. But these tortures were of no avail. As the boy concentrated his mind on the God of his heart, neither the poison of the serpents, nor the tusks of the elephants, nor the tongues of flames could hurt his body.

While the tyrant was thinking of what he should do next, a certain class of sorcerers went to him and said that they would undertake to bring up the boy in the manner desired by his father and that, if they too failed, he might devise fresh tortures. Hiranyakasipu agreed and freed Prahlada from his prison. The sorcerers took the boy to their house and did their best by means of arguments to prove to him that there was no God, no life beyond death and that good and evil were only matters of convenience. Prahlada listened calmly to their arguments and advanced counter-arguments and proved to them how false their teachings were. Not satisfied with this, he proceeded to teach true religion to the sons of these men. He would say to them : "Hear from me, O sons of Daityas, the supreme truth. This world is fleeting and full of pain. But take it from me there is a God of gods behind this world. He is not fleeting. He abides for ever. If we fix our minds and hearts on Him, we can rise above the pleasures and pains of this world and laugh at every care and be happy for ever. This universe that we see is only a manifestation of the God of gods. He lives in the hearts of all things and beings. Let us therefore lay aside the angry passions of our race, love all creatures and seek God within our souls. Let us strive to obtain that supreme happiness which is beyond the power of this world to give, and which everyone who fixes his mind on God will surely enjoy."

The sorcerers were alarmed at these teachings of Prahlada. They took the permission of the king to use their magic arts against the boy and even to destroy him if he did not yield. By their magic they then created a fearful female form breathing



flames of fire and sent her against him. She approached Prahlada and smote him on the breast with a flaming trident. The weapon fell down broken into a hundred pieces. The magic phantom, when she saw that she could do nothing against that young devotee of God, turned back on her own creators and enveloped them in flames. Prahlada saw the sorcerers being scorched to death before his very eyes. He then prayed fervently : "O Thou, God of gods, who art everywhere, the Creator and Supporter of all creatures, preserve these men from this magical and consuming fire. If, while being devoted to Thee, I have harboured no ill-will against any of my foes, let these men be restored to life. If the snakes that bit me, the elephants that trampled upon me, the fires that scorched me and the men that poisoned my food have been truly regarded by me as my friends, if I have been unshaken in my soul, and if I am pure and guiltless in Thy sight, then I implore Thee, let these Daitya sorcerers be restored to life."

The magicians immediately rose up, uninjured and happy. They bowed respectfully before the Prince and blessed him that he might live long and be happy. They then went to the king and narrated to him all that had happened.

Hiranyakasipu once again sent for his son and asked him by what counter-magic he was able to send back the creation of the magicians upon themselves and afterwards save them from destruction.

"How have you acquired these marvellous powers, Prahlada ?" asked his father. "Or did you possess them even at your birth, unknown to any of us ?"

"Whatever power I possess, father, is neither the result of magic," replied the youth, "nor a faculty of nature. It is no more than that which is possessed by all whose hearts recognise the God of gods abiding in them. He who thinks no evil of others, but considers them as himself, is ever free from fear. But he who inflicts pain upon others in thought, speech or act sows the seed of trouble for himself. I wish no evil to any, and speak or do no offence, for I see the same God in all beings as in my own soul. How could pain inflicted by any agent of yours affect me whose

heart is filled with the Eternal Being and whose eyes see the same Lord everywhere ? It is no magic, father, that overcomes evil but love, boundless love to all creatures, love which flows from the vision of God in all things."

The face of Hiranyakasipu darkened with fury as he listened to these words and he commanded his servants to hurl the prince down from the summit of the palace where he was sitting so that his body might be dashed to pieces on the rocks below. The Daityas accordingly hurled him down, and he fell cherishing the God of gods in his heart. But the earth, the nurse of all creatures, received him gently in her lap. Seeing that the boy was uninjured by the fall and was sound in every limb, the tyrant flew into a rage and ordered him to be bound with strong bonds and thrown into the sea. The Daityas carried out his orders and came back to the king and reported that the boy was floating on the waters and that the ocean was convulsed to its very depths and threatening to submerge the earth. Then Hiranyakasipu ordered them to hurl rocks into the sea and pile them in heaps upon Prahlada so that he might be buried under their weight.

"He is no son of mine, but a perpetual curse unto me and my kingdom," exclaimed the king. "Since he cannot die, let him live a thousand years at the bottom of the sea underneath these piles of rocks."

Accordingly the Daityas hurled upon Prahlada, whilst he was in the ocean, heavy rocks and piled them in heaps over him. But he, with his mind still undisturbed, offered praise to the God of gods. From the bottom of the sea rose the incessant prayer of the devotee on the wings of spirit:

"Glory to Thee, O Supreme Spirit, who as Brahma dost create the world, as Vishnu dost preserve it and as Rudra dost destroy it. Thou art the God of gods and of all orders of beings in this universe. Glory to Thee again and again, from whom all things proceed and to whom all things return. Thou art all, for all things are only forms of Thee. Thou art everywhere, here at the bottom of the sea as in the sky above. Thou art in me and I am in Thee. I am with Thee everywhere, I too am all things, and all things are in

me. I am everlasting, imperishable and unchangeable, for I am one with Thee."

Thus meditating upon the Supreme Spirit, Prahlada entirely forgot himself, overcame all mental limitations and became one with the object of his meditations. At once the bonds burst as under, the piles of rocks which lay heavy on him gave way and he came out of the main. When he beheld the outer world again, he remembered who he was and once more chanted the praise of the Lord :

"Glory to Thee, O God, who art both perceptible and imperceptible, divisible and indivisible, definable and indefinable, mutable and immutable. Thou art both the one and the many. Glory unto Thee, the First Cause of all."

Prahlada's trials were now over. The God of gods whom he had worshipped with such devotion through all his sufferings now appeared before him and said : "I am pleased, O Prahlada, with the faithful devotion you have shown to Me. Demand from Me whatever boon you desire."

Prahlada replied : "In all the thousand births through which I may be doomed to pass, may my faith in Thee, O Lord, never know any decay ! May I have the same passionate desire for Thee as I have now !" The Lord then observed :

You have, O Prahlada, a passionate devotion to Me and you shall ever have it. Now choose another boon."

"Do Thou, O Lord," said Prahlada, "then pardon my father for the sin he has committed in punishing me for praising Thee. I have been stabbed with weapons of steel, I have been thrown into flames, I have been bitten by venomous snakes and trampled upon by elephants. I have been given poisoned food, I have been hurled from the top of the palace, I have been bound and cast into the sea and heavy rocks have been heaped upon me. And all this has been done to me because I put my faith in Thee, and all this has been endured by me unharmed through Thy merey. Do Thou now extend this mercy to my father, and free him from his ignorance and sin." To this the Lord replied : "It shall be as you desire, O

Prahlada. But I will grant you another boon. Choose what you want."

"All my desires, O Lord," said Prahlada, "have been fulfilled by the boon that Thou hast already granted, that my faith in Thee shall never suffer decay. I require no other boon."

The Lord was pleased with Prahlada's words and said : "Since your heart is filled with such unshakable trust in Me, you shall, when your earthly course is run, come unto Me and live in Me for ever."

So saying the God of gods vanished from His devotee's sight. Prahlada went back to his father and bowed before his feet. Hiranyakasipu rose from his seat, embraced his son and kissed him on the forehead and, shedding tears, said : "Praise be that you are alive, my boy."

There was a great change in the heart of the king of the Daityas. He repented of his former cruelty and treated his son with kindness ever afterwards.

This is how the *Vishnu Parana* ends this famous story. But the *Bhagavata Parana* relates that Hiranyakasipu never relented and that, when his son said that God was everywhere, he fiercely demanded whether He was in the pillar of his hall. and that, when Prahlada said He was, he struck it with his fist and that God came out of it in the form of a man with a lion's head and tore the tyrant to pieces.

The reader may choose for himself the ending he prefers.

THE ASCENT OF DHRUVA

SUNITI was the favourite queen of a powerful king, Uttanapada by name, the monarch of a prosperous province in India. Happily she lived at the court, honoured and loved not only by her husband, but also by the people. And when she gave birth to a handsome, strong boy, her joy was perfect. The king was proud of Suniti, for she was very good and clever and beautiful. The little prince was a jewel and the darling of his royal parents. They called him Dhruva.

Suruchi, a younger wife, jealous, ambitious and anxious for the welfare of her own son, set to work in many subtle ways to gain ascendancy over the king's mind. Her boy enjoyed all the advantages of a prince: but Dhruva was the first-born son of the king, and he would be successor to the throne. She could not bear the thought. She so worked herself into the good graces of her husband that her son might supersede the rights of Dhruva and become king when his father should leave this world.

The king, observing this, would, in his stronger moments, take himself to task and put aside all thought of partiality toward his younger queen. But he had not the courage to rebuke her for her evil intentions. As time went on, Suruchi began to wield an ever stronger influence over her royal husband. At last the king was entirely in her power, and her wish became his law. It went so far that, finally, at the instigation of Suruchi, Suniti and her little son were banished from the court. A cottage was assigned to them on the edge of a great forest, far from the royal palace.

Dhruva, still of tender age, soon forgot his former home. He found much to amuse himself in his new surroundings. The forest was near, and there he played all alone, while his mother was occupied with her household duties, for now the queen had no

attendants to carry out her bidding. She cooked the meals and kept the cottage clean. She also taught her boy, for the school was far away.

Dhruva loved the living creatures of the forest. The deer and the rabbits and other strange animals came to him, and took from his hand the food he held out to them. The queen, seeing her son so happy, would sometimes forget her grief, and she would laugh and play with him.

Thus the days passed by, till Dhruva was seven years old. He was a manly little fellow, strong and fearless. Suniti's face would light up and her eyes would shine when she watched him playing in the forest. A secret hope still dwelt in her breast: Would fortune, perchance, change some day in favour of her child? Who knew? The king might still repent and justice triumph. The father loved the boy, and her too. She was sure of that. Would not that love assert itself in the end? Would not her husband come to his senses and wake up from the evil spell that his younger wife had woven around him? Such were her thoughts.

One day Dhruva, all out of breath, came running toward her from the forest. He put his arms around her neck, and with his burning cheek against her own, impetuously asked :

"Mother, who is my father?"

"Your father, son, is the king. He lives in the palace far away."

"May I go to him, mother?"

"Yes, you may go, my child. And when you see your father tell him that I still love him."

Early, the next morning, Suniti, holding Dhruva by the hand, set out toward the royal court. The sun was shining hot when they reached the palace. The queen then said to her son : "Dhruva, remember that you are a prince, the son of the king. Go to the guard and tell him that you want to see the king, your father. I shall wait here under the big banyan tree till you return."

Dhruva ran toward the guard and delivered his message. The guard sent word to the king that his eldest son was at the gate,

awaiting admittance. "Let Dhruva enter," said the king. The boy ran up to him fearlessly. The king lifted him in his arms, put him on his knee and caressed him tenderly : for was not Dhruva his own dear son ?

The boy said : "My mother is waiting outside, in the shade of the big banyan tree. She will wait till my return. She still loves you."

A mingled feeling of joy and sadness brought tears to the king's eyes. Just then the door opened and there was revealed the angry face of Suruchi, the younger queen. Hastily the king put down his son. Dhruva fled before the menacing figure. On the threshold he halted one moment to look back. But his father frowned at him. Then Dhruva was disillusioned. His father, the king, had quaked before an angry woman. He had pushed him aside and had frowned at him. Was his father so weak ? Could he not protect him from a jealous woman ? His father had failed him!

The boy ran to his mother, flushed and excited. His lips trembled as he spoke to her : "Mother, tell me, is there anyone in the world who is stronger than my father ?"

The queen was startled at the strange question. Then, looking into Dhruva's eyes, she understood that he had met with disappointment. Smiling sadly, she answered : "Yes, my son, there is One who is all-powerful; our sages call Him the 'Lotus-eyed'.* "

"And where may the Lotus-eyed be found, where does he dwell, mother ?"

Suniti hesitated. "What does Dhruva mean ?" she thought. "He seems so grave, so serious. Will he set out in search of Him who is found when all else is abandoned? Will he leave me ? Will he follow in the footsteps of the sages and wander forth, alone, in search of Him in whom alone is perfect strength ? That must not be." Hoping to ward off the danger, she replied : "The Lotus-eyed, my son, dwells in the heart of the forest where wild beasts live.

* God Vishnu

Far away and hard to find is the Lotus-eyed, and the path is full of danger."



Dhruva remained silent. But in the middle of the night, when his mother was asleep, he stole from the cottage in search of the

Lotus-eyed. But first he kissed his mother good-bye, very, very softly that she might not awaken. Then he halted, just a moment, in the doorway, and whispered :

"Lotus-eyed, you are all strength, protect my mother, and me also." Then, boldly, he ran into the forest.

On and on he went, over winding paths, through thorny bushes, always deeper into the forest. At last he came to a dark spot where the sun and the sky were hidden by thick foliage. "Surely," thought Dhruva, "here must be the heart of the forest where the Lotus-eyed dwells. Let me sit down and wait till he comes." But being very tired, he lay down, and, with his head on the soft moss, fell asleep. Dhruva did not sleep long. A strange sound in the bush nearby awakened him. He lifted his head and listened. Then he rubbed his eyes and sat up. He saw something between the twigs and leaves. Two eyes were looking at him, eyes shining like coals of fire.

"It must be the Lotus-eyed," thought Dhruva, and stepping forward, he laid his hand on a soft and glossy head. A hot breath touched his face. He saw a lithe, striped body and a long tail, sweeping from side to side.

"Art thou the Lotus-eyed?" the boy asked eagerly. But the tiger did not answer. He hung his head in shame and turned away.

Then the bear came. But Dhruva, loving all creatures, knew no fear. Putting his hand on the thick, shaggy hair, he looked at the huge head and said : "Art thou He ?" The bear looked first to the right and then to the left, made a low growling noise, then turned and went away. Dhruva was a little disappointed, but he waited patiently. At last came a tall man with a friendly face. He placed his hand lightly on Dhruva's head.

It was Narada, the great sage.

"Art thou He who is all strength ?" asked the boy.

"Nay, child, I am not He," replied the sage, "but I will show you how you may find Him. I will tell you a prayer. Repeat it again and again with full attention and meditate on its meaning."

Dhruva sat down, folded his hands, and prayed : "Salutation to Thee, Lotus-eyed, reveal Thyself to me." He prayed and meditated long, oh ! so long. The beasts of the forest came and nosed the strange little figure that sat there like a statue. But so absorbed was the boy in his prayer that he did not notice the beasts. Thus, with his whole mind on the prayer, saying it over and over again, Dhruva sat in the depth of the forest. Then, at last, he opened his eyes, and there stood before him a beautiful figure shining like burnished gold, with eyes like two full-blown lotuses. The boy quivered with joy. "O, Lotus-eyed!" he exclaimed, "now I have found Thee. I no longer wish to be a king. Take me to Thy home that I may be with Thee always."

The Lotus-eyed smiled and said : "Dhruva, I love you but I cannot take you to my heaven, not yet. You have come to this world to be a great king. Go to your mother and with her return to the palace. Your father is waiting for you; I have touched his heart. He has come to his senses and is now smitten with remorse for having sent you and your mother to the forest. Go, he will receive you and when you come of age he will make you a king."

Dhruva rose and walked back to the little cottage at the edge of the forest. Enfolded in his mother's arms, he told her what had happened.

Suniti, overjoyed, made ready at once to take her son to the palace. All night they travelled, and as the sun rose behind the big banyan tree, mother and son knocked at the palace-gate.

The king, informed of the arrival of his beloved wife and son, at once made ready to give them a royal reception. Bugles were blown, flags and banners were hoisted, and the palace was decorated with wreaths and flowers. The king came to the palace-gate, took his son in his arms, and led the queen into the royal chamber. In humility he craved forgiveness, and in his behaviour he tried to make up for the cruel treatment he had meted out to his wife and child.

Suniti resumed her former position as the first queen, and the boy was educated in a way becoming his position. Suruchi, deeply humiliated, soon after died in sorrow; and Dhruva, when he came

of age, was established on the throne. For many years he ruled his subjects, and under his capable and just reign the country flourished as it had never done before.

With all the cares and occupations of royalty, Dhruva remained firmly devoted to the King of all kings, the Lord who dwells in the heart of all living creatures, worshipping Him daily during long hours of meditation. But at last, realizing the vanity of worldly glory, he renounced the throne in order to dwell with ascetics in a forest-retreat. There he practised severe austerities till one day the Lord, being pleased with his constant devotion, sent a celestial chariot to convey Dhruva to the region of eternal bliss.

Now Dhruva shines forever in the heaven around which the sun and moon and planets, the stars and stellar systems perform their rounds.

And today the people in India, pointing to the Pole Star, will tell you : "There lives Dhruva, ever steadfast, unwavering, stationary, in a firmament of eternal change, a symbol of constancy and endurance."

—SWAMI ATULANANDA

THE BIRTH OF KRISHNA

KING Kamsa, the most powerful and tyrannical monarch of his time, had a sister Devaki by name, whom he loved very tenderly. Devaki was betrothed to Vasudeva. As a token of his fraternal affection the king presented the newly affianced with many costly gifts, and declared that after their wedding he himself would drive their carriage.

In due time he fulfilled this promise. Devaki and Vasudeva were very happy over their good fortune in having as their driver the dreaded monarch. There were ovations and rejoicings as they drove along, and everywhere the people were filled with happiness.

All went well until, one day all of a sudden. King Kamsa heard a voice from the void saying : "O thou foolish one, whom art thou driving so merrily ? Knowest thou not that the eighth issue of her womb shall be the cause of thy death?" At this he sprang up from his seat. With his sword he would have killed his sister then and there, had not Vasudeva interposed and prayed to the king to spare the life of his newly married wife, reminding him that not Devaki but her eighth child would be the cause of his death. He promised King Kamsa because of his fear, that each and every one of her children would be given over to him to deal with as he wished. Thus was King Kamsa pacified.

When in the course of time children were born to Vasudeva and Devaki, they fulfilled their promise to Kamsa, who killed, one after another, seven of their children as soon as they were born. This of course caused much grief to Vasudeva and Devaki but there was no other way to escape. When at last the time for the birth of the eighth child approached, Kamsa ordered Vasudeva and Devaki to be cast into a prison. Accordingly, both of them

were thrown into the same dungeon and bound with the same chain. Their only consolation was in prayer to the almighty, all-loving God; and so they both prayed earnestly from the depths of their hearts, imploring Him to protect them and their child. While thus ardently praying, they fell into a swoon. In the gloom of that unconsciousness a light suddenly flashed; and in that light the thick, dark cloud of misery vanished, and with it the accumulated sorrows of recent years. The Lord of Love appeared before them, healing the wounds in their hearts and cheering them with His benign smile and spoke to them these sweet words :

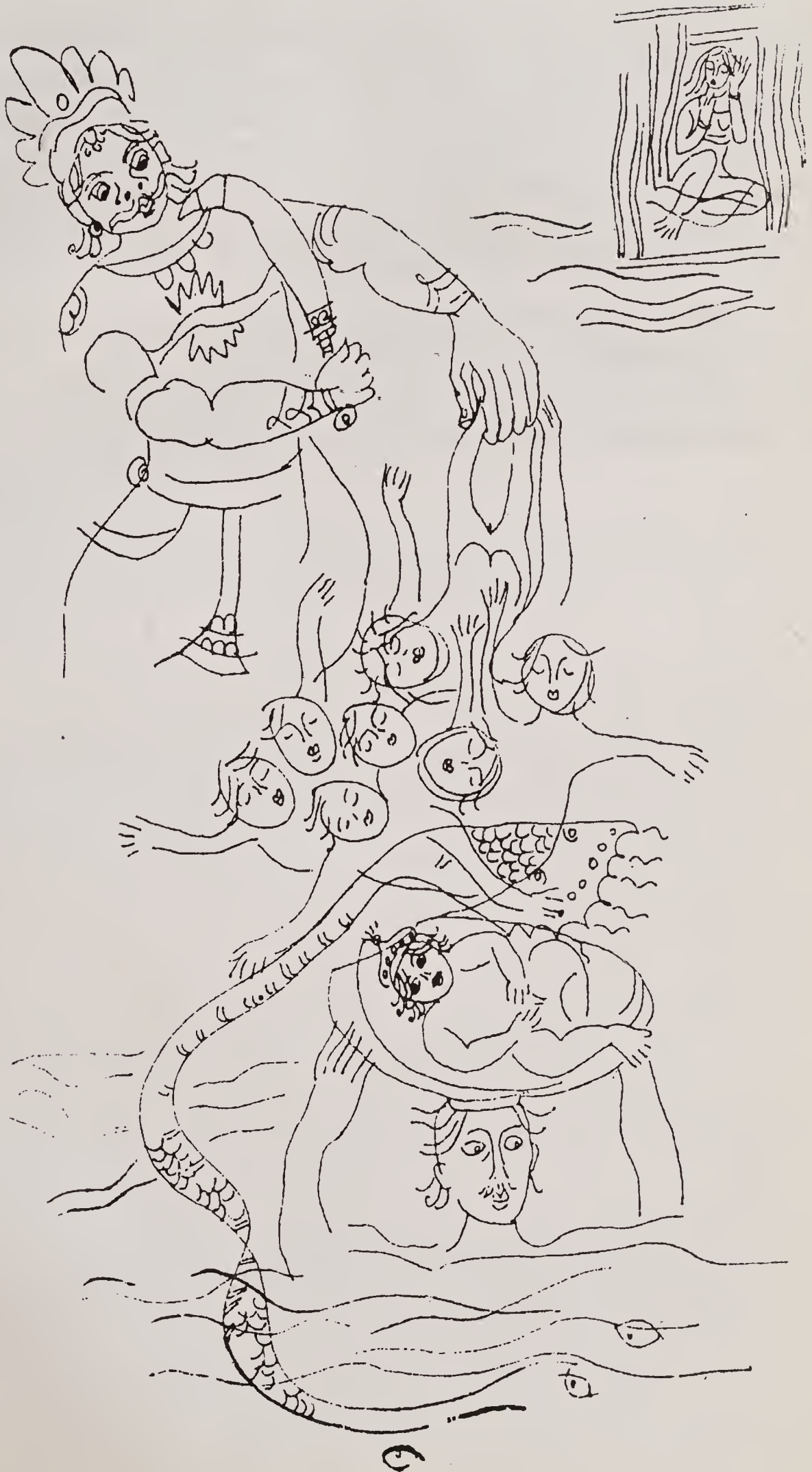
"Father and mother, weep no more. I have come at last to your rescue and to release all that is good. The Earth shall complain no longer. The days of the wicked are numbered. The wretched Kamsa shall die. Once again there will be peace and happiness on earth.

"Open your eyes and see me born as your child. Take me, father, to the house of thy good friend King Nanda in Gokula. His wife, Queen Yasoda, has just now given birth to a daughter. Exchange me for that daughter and bring her to this dungeon, leaving me on the lap of Yasoda, who will be sleeping at the time. Nothing shall bar my path."

So it came to pass that Krishna, who was to remove the bondage of humanity, was born in a prison cell belonging to King Kamsa.

Devaki kissed the sweet face of her child, forgetting all danger, but Vasudeva remembered the instructions received in the vision. He clasped the child to his bosom, and the moment he was ready to leave the prison his chains fell away and the gates of the prison cell opened. He crossed the river Yamuna, and, without meeting with any danger, he exchanged his son for the infant daughter of Yasoda. As he returned and placed her on the lap of Devaki, the gates of the prison closed, and he found himself again in chains.

Early in the morning when Kamsa heard of the birth of a female child, he at once came to the prison to see her. Vasudeva implored him to spare the life of the child because there could be no cause of danger in a girl. But Kamsa paid no heed to his



request. Taking the child by the feet and lifting it high he was about to dash it against a stone, when behold! the infant slipped from his fierce, demoniac grip and assuming high above him the beautiful form of the Divine Mother, looked down upon him, and said : "Wretch, dost thou think to avert the will of the Almighty ? Thy destroyer is flourishing in Gokula." Having said so, she vanished, leaving King Kamsa trembling.

The same morning all the people of Gokula rejoiced when they learnt of the birth of a son to their beloved King Nanda. And Yasoda, the queen mother, unaware of the exchange which had taken place, looked with joy at the sweet face of her son.

THE STORY OF THE DWARF

VALI, the king of the *asuras*, was invincible, for he had the grace of God on his side. He dethroned Indra, king of the *devas*, took possession of his kingdom, and became the monarch of the three worlds.

Aditi, the beloved mother of Indra, was lamenting her son's defeat, when Kasyapa, her husband, returned home after a long absence.

Kasyapa felt very sorry for his wife, and sought to comfort her by saying : "Inscrutable is the power of *maya*. All beings are deluded by false attachments. O my beloved, know thyself and be free. There is but one all-pervading existence, the blissful Atman. Worship Vasudeva, the God of Love, the innermost Self in all beings. Through His grace shalt thou be free from delusion."

"Teach me then," said Aditi, "how I may worship the great Teacher of all teachers, the Lord of the universe, that He may fulfil the desire of my heart. Teach me how I may please the Lord, so that He will grant me whatever boon I may ask for."

"Gladly will I teach you, O Aditi, how to please the Lord by service and worship, even as I have learned from Brahma, the son of God.

"God is to be worshipped with whole-souled devotion and meditated upon with focused mind. Feel His living presence, and make obeisance unto Him with the following sacred prayers:

"Thou art Lord Vasudeva, the Supreme Being,
The witness, the refuge of all,
Thou art shining in the hearts of all.
Obeisance unto Thee!

"Unmanifest art Thou, beyond all knowledge,
For Thou art the source of all knowledge.
Obeisance unto Thee!

"Thou art the sacrifice, and Thou art the giver of the fruits of
the sacrifice;
The wisdom of the Vedas is Thy very soul.
Thee we salute!

"Thou art the compassionate father,
Thou art the loving mother,
Thou art power, and Thou art knowledge :
The Lord of all beings.
Thee we salute!

"Thou art life,
Thou art intelligence,
Thou art the centre and soul of every sphere.
Thou art attainable by those who practise Thy yoga in
sincerity.
Obeisance unto Thee!

"Thou art the God of all gods,
The Eternal Witness;
Thou art the sage Narayana,
Thou art Hara, and Thou art Hari,
We salute Thee!

"Thou art Keshava, the Lord of Love;
Thy form is universal;
Eternal prosperity is Thy consort.
Obeisance unto Thee!

"Thou art the supreme refuge,
The giver of the highest boon,
Thou worshipful Lord;
The wise worship Thy Lotus Feet,
Desiring to attain the highest.
May it please Thee to shower Thy mercy upon us !

"Thus praising the glory of the Lord, fix thy mind on Him.
Associate with the holy and please them by service. Serve all

beings as embodiments of the divine."

Thus taught by the sage Kasyapa, Aditi shunned all indolence and devoted herself earnestly to the worship of the Lord and to the meditation upon Him. She brought all her passions under control; her mind was stilled, and in her heart she realized the presence of the all-pervading Vasudeva, the Soul of all souls. Great was her happiness! She was completely absorbed in that one presence; her heart melted in love, and she prayed :

"Thou art Holiness;
Holiness is Thy name.
Thou art the friend of the poor and lowly.
Thou art manifest in the hearts of all
Who take shelter at Thy Lotus Feet;
They are purified by Thy holy presence.

"Thou art the highest of the high;
Thy peace reigneth in the universe.
Associating Thyself with Thy divine maya,
Thou dost create, preserve, and dissolve this universe;
Yet Thou existest in Thine own primal glory, pure and
absolute.

Obeisance unto Thee !

"O Thou infinite blissful existence,
If Thou art pleased,
Thou dost bestow all Thy glory. Thy power, and Thy grace upon
Thy devotees."

Aditi felt a stillness within, and in the silence of her heart she heard the voice of God saying unto her :

"O thou mother of the *devas*, I know what thou seekest. Thou desirest the victory of thy sons over Vali, the king of the *asuras*. But Vali is now under the protection of my power. I am, however, pleased with thee, and thy desire shall be fulfilled, but in what manner I will not reveal. But this I will tell thee : my power will be born in thy womb as thy son."

In due course, this promise was fulfilled and a son, with all the auspicious marks of a divine man, was born to Kasyapa and Aditi.

The son, however, was a dwarf. He became known as the dwarf Brahmin.

Vali, still the king of the three worlds, held a great sacrifice, to which all the Brahmins were invited.

The dwarf set out to attend the ceremony. As he approached the place where the sacrifice was being prepared, all the wise Brahmins and Vali marvelled at the radiance which they saw illuminating the whole region. Soon they found out that the radiance proceeded from the dwarf. Then they all stood up in reverence, and Vali prostrated himself at his feet. Vali then addressed the dwarf, saying :

"Obeisance unto thee, Brahmin. Thou art the embodiment of all the divine powers. By thy holy presence I am blessed, and blessed indeed are my forefathers also. Blessed are all the three worlds by thy grace. Tell me thy wish, that I may please and serve thee."

To this the dwarf replied : "I am much pleased by thy reverence. It is befitting thee, for thou art the grandson of Prahlada, the greatest of the devotees who have blessed this world. Thou hast promised me any gift which I may choose. Grant me only three steps of ground."

Vali laughed at this trivial request. "Oh, why ask for three steps of ground ?" he said. "I can give thee a large island or a big estate, so that thou mayest live in comfort with all thy needs supplied; I pray thee, ask for a greater boon."

The dwarf smiled, in turn, and replied : "I shall be satisfied with as much space as can be covered with three steps; I do not seek for more."

Vali continued to be amused by this foolish desire of the dwarf and said : "Thy desire is granted. May it please thee to accept the boon."

At this moment Sukracharya, the priest of Vali, intervened, saying, "What calamity hast thou brought unto thyself by thy promise of this gift? Dost thou not see that this dwarf, born of

Kasyapa and Aditi, is the embodiment of the divine power? He can cover the whole universe with his form, and thou wilt lose everything. Thou hast given everything to him; there is nothing left for thee. He will give back the kingdom of the three worlds to Indra, the eldest of the *devas*. One step of this dwarf will cover the earth, a second step will cover the heaven, and his form will cover the rest of the universe; there will be nothing left for his third step. It is not even in thy power to keep thy word !"

Vali now realized the gravity of his promise, but there was no way out. He said, "I am not sorry for my promise of a gift to this dwarf. I must keep it. Am I not born in the family of Prahlada ?"

Now Vali turned to the dwarf, and with great reverence said : "Please accept the gift." Then as he again looked at the dwarf, he found the whole universe existing in him. As the dwarf then advanced his first step, behold ! he covered the whole earth : his body covered the sky, and his arms embraced the four directions. With his second step he covered the heavens and the rest of the universe. There was no room anywhere for his next step. Whereupon the dwarf smilingly looked at Vali and asked, "Now where may I take my third step ?"

Vali humbly and reverently said: "I must keep my word. True, there is no more space in the whole universe for your next step—but here is my head. Place thy foot on my head for I am thine for ever.

"Thy Feet, O Lord, shelter the universe. How immeasurably blessed I am—I who have been so long blinded by my pride of power and wealth! Bestow thy mercy and grace upon me by accepting all that belonged to me, and in return give thyself to me."

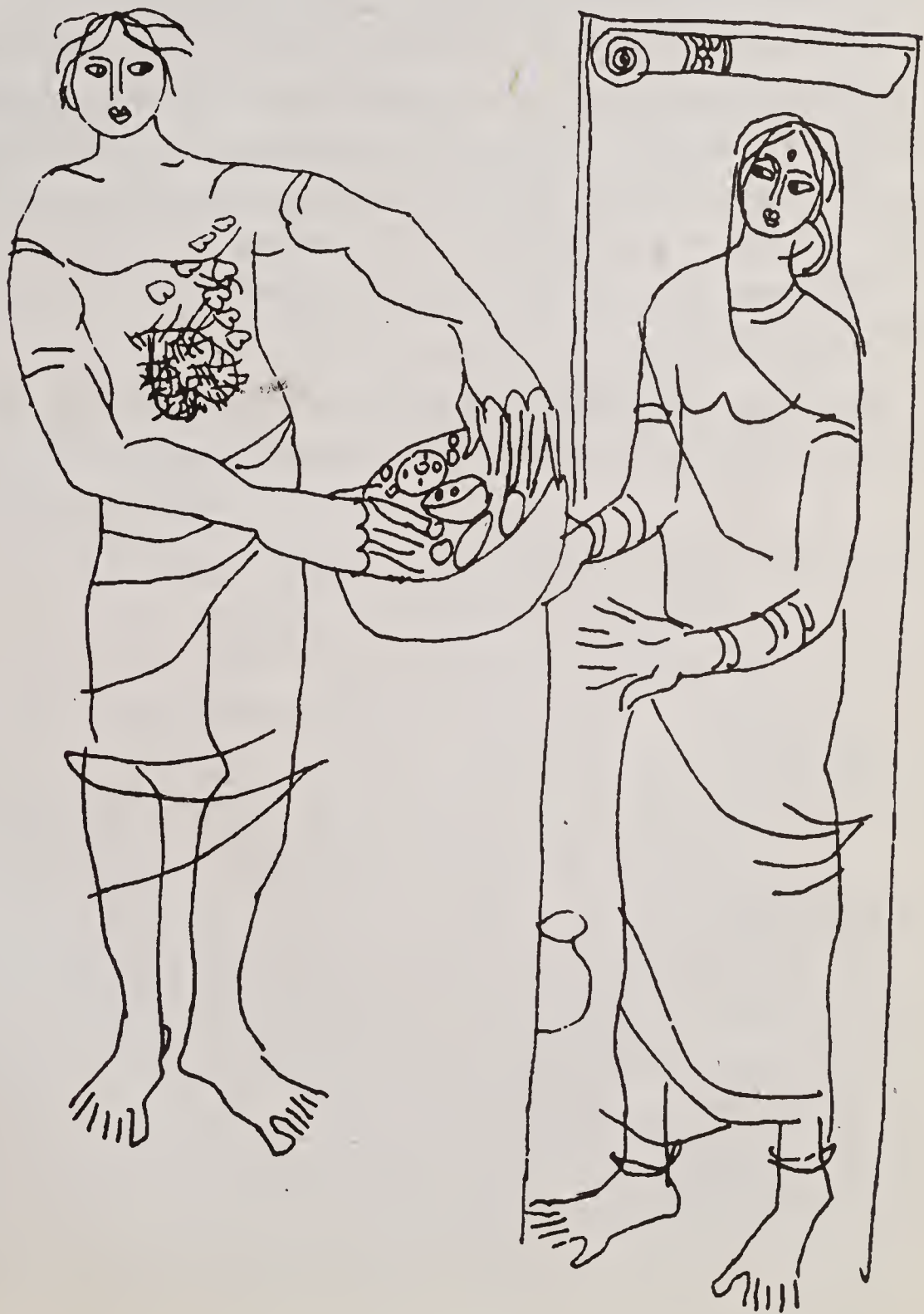
The Lord of the Universe in the form of the dwarf said : "My devotee is glorified everywhere. Thou art my devotee, and thou art truthful. In heaven and on earth art thou glorified for this gift of thine to me."

GOD NEVER FAILS

LORD KRISHNA says in the *Gita*: "Those who worship Me, renouncing all actions in Me, regarding Me as supreme, meditating on Me with entire devotion, for them whose thought is fixed on Me, I become ere long, O son of Pritha, the Saviour out of the ocean of this mortal world. For I am the abode of Brahman, the Immortal and the Immutable, the Eternal Substance, and the unfailing Bliss." We kneel in a vast silence and darkness, and hear words falling like water, drop by drop.

Nothing is omitted from the *Gita* that the unconsolated heart requires. There are even the tender promises of daily bread, so dear to the anxious : "They who depend on Me, putting aside all care, whatsoever they need, I myself carry it to them," runs one verse. Of this a beautiful story is told in the villages. A Brahmin sat copying the text, but when the word "carry" had been written, he felt a doubt. "My dear," he said, turning to consult his wife, "thinkest thou not it is irreverent to say 'carry' here ? Did not our Lord mean 'send' ?" "Beyond doubt, beloved," answered his wife, "it is as thou sayest. Let the word be 'send'." Then the man took his penknife and erased the word he had just written, substituting his own emendation for it. A moment later he rose up to go and bathe. But his wife stood before him with troubled face. "I told thee not," she said, "that there is no food in the house, and nought have I to cook for thee." The Brahmin smiled gently. "Let us call upon our Lord to fulfil His own promise;" he replied quietly, "meantime, I shall go and bathe," and he passed into the next room. Hardly a few minutes had passed when his wife was called to the door by a beautiful youth who stood there with a basketful of delicious food, ready for eating. "Who sent me this ?" the woman asked in amazement. "Your husband called me to carry it," said the lad carelessly, putting the basket, as he spoke, into her

hands. But to her horror, as he lifted his arms, the housewife noted cuts and gashes above his heart. "Alas, my poor child, who hath wounded thee?" she cried.



Your husband, before he called me, cut me with a small sharp weapon," was the quiet answer. Dumb with astonishment, the Brahmin's wife turned away to bestow the viands he had brought, and when she came back to the door the youth had gone. At that instant her husband re-entered the room, having returned, as she supposed from bathing. Her wonder about the food was forgotten in indignant sympathy. "Why," she cried, "didst thou so hurt the messenger?" The man looked at her without understanding. "Him whom thou sentest to me with food, as thou didst go to bathe," she explained. "To bathe!" he stammered, "I have not yet been!" Then the eyes of husband and wife met, and they both knew who had come to them, and how they had wounded the heart of the Lord. And the Brahmin returned to the sacred text, and once more erasing the word restored it to its original form, for there can be no doubt that the true reading is, "They who depend on Me, putting aside all care, whatsoever they need, I myself carry it to them."

Such was the faith in God in ancient India, and even today that faith does live in the hearts of the peasants.

—B. V. B. journal

WHO IS HIGH OR LOW ?

THIS is an incident in the life of Emperor Ashoka, the renowned Indian Emperor (after having embraced Buddhism).

Emperor Ashoka had a minister by the name of Yasha, who did not approve of the Emperor bowing or doing obeisance to all the Buddhist monks, since he thought most of them came from low castes.

One day he drew the attention of the Emperor to this effect saying it was improper that a person—an Emperor— should keep on doing obeisance to any monk, not knowing his qualifications. Emperor Ashoka did not reply. This was not an opportune moment, he thought.

Some time afterwards he decreed that all his ministers should each acquire an animal's head and go to a public market to sell these heads. He called Yasha and ordered him that he should take with him a human head only and not an animal's head.

This was a very queer order. None liked the idea. But what could they do ? None could oppose it. It must be carried out at any cost lest the Emperor's displeasure be invoked.

It happened that all the animal heads were quickly disposed of, leaving only Yasha lingering alone at the market place looking for a buyer. Yasha waited, but to no avail. He even offered the human head free, yet there was no one to take it. All the ministers had by now returned to the courtroom to report, except Yasha. In due time, he had to be summoned to report. He returned looking very dejected and dismayed. In a low tone he told of his plight—his inability to dispose of the human head.



"What could the reason be ?" asked Emperor Ashoka

"They simply abhorred its sight," replied Yasha.

Did they suspect the head to be that of a layman ?"

"Not that. It could have been anyone's."

Supposing it was my head, could you have then found a buyer ?" Yasha was too afraid to answer this question. Only when Emperor Ashoka gave him the assurance that nothing should befall him did Yasha reply : "Not even then, my Lord. No one would want to look at the human head, whether it be of an ordinary citizen or an Emperor's—it is still a head and an obnoxious head."

"You say people would not differentiate between heads, be they of laymen or emperors. This has been your experience. It is so true. Why then should you feel so embarrassed when my head bows to the monks, which is purely as a token of respect for their spiritual knowledge and life of self-abnegation. Place not your assumption on a person's status but what is in him—virtues and wisdom. Even under a shattered or ugliest of bodily flesh there can exist the purest of hearts.

"Jewels are found among worthless pebbles. Only the eyes like those of a shrewd jeweller would locate them and know their values; but not the mundane eyes under the veil of ignorance. Do not let your mind be illusioned at the sight of mere physical body."

Yasha could now clearly see the logic of Emperor Ashoka's actions.

Were not other great illusion-free thinkers and prophets who had transformed themselves—purged completely of physical ego—able to say, as Socrates said: "I am not an Athenian or a Greek, I am a human being." And Jesus said :

"There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither Greek nor Barbarian."

THE DISBELIEVER

LONG ago there were two friends, two young men of the same age and occupation, who, although they were devoted friends, were always quarrelling.

The trouble was that whereas one of them was a believer, the other was a confirmed atheist, and consequently the arguments they would have over whether God existed or not often became quite fierce.

One day a dreadful thing happened.

They went off to work as usual, which was cutting down trees for firewood, when again they began to argue.

"I tell you there is a God," said the believer.

"Nonsense," smiled the other cynically.

"There must be a God, I tell you, because in the first place we didn't create ourselves, did we? And in the second place, nothing can come from nothing..."

"Oh, fiddlesticks," said the disbeliever calmly, "it's poor fools like you who believe everything they are told because they have no sense to think for themselves. Now if you had read as much as I have on the subject..."

Suddenly his friend lost his temper completely.

"There is a God, I tell you," he screamed, and raising the axe he was carrying brought the blunt end crashing down on his friend's head, killing him outright and raising a bump.

Then horrified and full of remorse at what he had done, he hit himself on the head and slumped down dead beside the body of his companion.

Presently they both stood, sadly looking down at the mortal frames they had so violently vacated, for they were now in their subtle bodies.



But habit dies hard, and when they realised they weren't at all dead, they began to argue again.

"Now look what you've done," complained the agnostic. "You had no right to hit me with the hatchet."

"I was merely trying to impress upon you," said the other patiently, "the undeniable fact that there is a God."

"That's all very well, but you could have been a little more tactful."

Just then a holy man came upon the scene and, seeing the two youthful bodies lying there, began to weep in pity. Solemnly he began to pray that life be again restored to those two bodies that had been so cruelly struck down in the prime of youth. And so earnest were his entreaties that two gods came down in response.

The gods looked at the bodies, and observing that they were young and fresh and, apart from the bumps, almost as good as new, they decided that they would themselves inhabit them, and go a-romping about the earth for a while. Whereupon the holy man was overjoyed to see his prayer answered, for the bodies came to life, stood up, turned to each other and smiled, then hand in hand joyfully went on their way.

"There," exclaimed the believer triumphantly, "I told you there was a God."

"Oh fiddlesticks," said the agnostic calmly, "it's poor fools like you who believe everything they see. Now if you had read as much as I have on the subject..."

But his companion wasn't listening any more. He was reaching for the axe again.

A LESSON FROM THE BUDDHA

ONE day as the Blessed One kept residence during the rainy season at Jetavana near Savatthi, as usual, he preached the Good Law. Among the gathering of monks and laymen was a householder named Maha Pala, a man of great wealth. Hearing the Law, "lovely in its beginning, its middle and its end," he longed in his heart to enter the Order (Sangha). On arranging his affairs and giving his possessions to his younger brother, he completed five years of successive rainy seasons of study under the Teacher. By the Illumined One, Maha Pala was then admitted to the Order and given a new name. Elder Cakkupala (the Seeing Pala), and a formula for meditation leading to *arhatship*.

In a distant monastery, choosing so small a cell that he could sit down or walk but not lie down, the new Elder practised meditation by day and by night. Soon his eyes watered and gave him constant pain, which ailment the city doctor could not heal. Gradually he lost the sight of both the eyes. Yet he continued meditation until he became an Arhat, freed from Depravities, and lived during each rainy season at the Vihara of the Blessed One at Jetavana, near Savatthi.

One day, a group of visiting monks came to the monastery, listened to the Tathagata, saluted the eighty Chief Elders, and asked to visit also the blind Elder Cakkupala. Now, a rain storm in the night had brought out a swarm of insects. The blind Elder, sleepless but full of energy after the storm, had walked up and down the cloister of newly wet earth before his cell door, and thus, unseeing, he trod upon insects which perished in great numbers. When the visiting monks beheld them they were offended, and said one to another : "See what the Elder Cakkupala has done. When he had sight of his eyes, he slept and did no sin.

But now that he has lost his sight, he has destroyed these insects. 'That which is right (dhamma) I will do,' said he, but that which was not right (adhamma) he has done..."

So off they went to report it to the Tathagata.

"But did you see the Elder Cakkupala killing the insects as he walked?"

"We did not. Reverend Sir."

"Precisely as you did not see him, so also did he not see those insects. Monks, they that are freed from the Depravities have no thought of killing."

"Reverend Sir, seeing that he was destined to become an Arhat, and you named him the 'Seeing Pala,' how was it that he became blind?"

"Monks, it was by reason of his misdeed in a former existence."

"Why, Reverend Sir, what did he do?"

"Well then. Monks, listen."

And so the Blessed One gathered the visiting Bhikkhus (monks) about him, augmented by all those who dearly loved one of his good stories, to hear how the Elder Cakkupala, the Seeing Pala, came to his blindness in this life by reason of a Past Life : from his seat of reverence, the Buddha began :

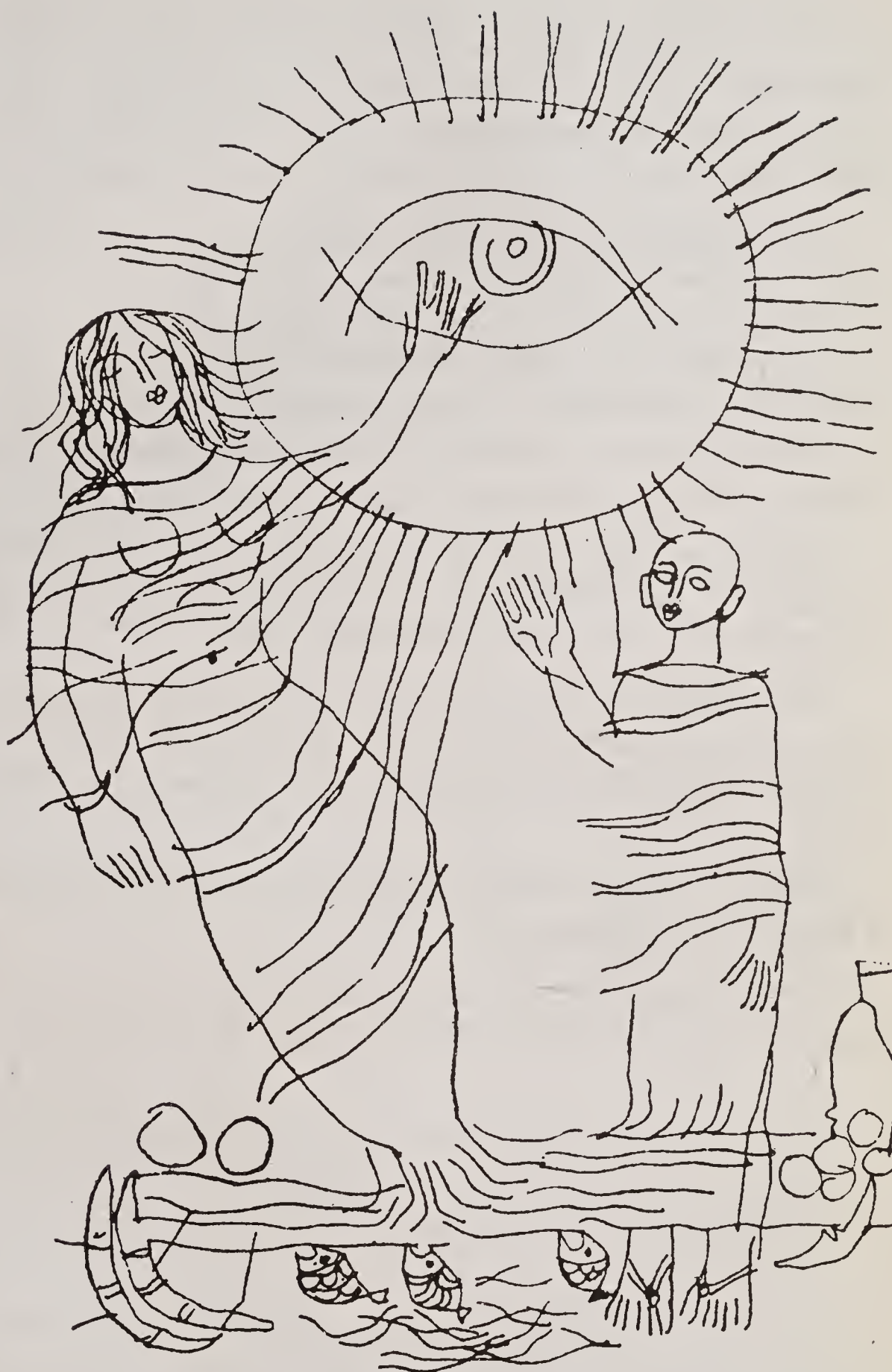
"In times long past, when the king of Kasi reigned at Benares, a certain physician went through towns and villages practising his profession. Seeing a woman with weak eyes, he asked her, 'What is the matter with you?'

" 'My eyesight has failed.'

" 'I will prescribe for you.'

" 'Do so, master.'

" 'What will you give me?'



" 'If you succeed in making my eyes well and strong again, I will become your slave, and my sons and daughters too.' "

"Very well,' said he. So he prescribed a remedy for her, and with a single application her eyes became well and strong again."

"Upon this she thought, 'I promised to become his slave, and my sons and daughters too. But he will not treat me kindly. Therefore I will deceive him.' So when the physician came and asked her how she was getting on, she answered, 'Before, my eyes pained me a little; but now they hurt me worse than ever.'

"The physician thought, 'This woman is deceiving me because she is unwilling to give me anything. I don't want her fee; now I will make her blind.' So he went home and told his wife about the matter. His wife said nothing. Then he compounded an ointment, went to the woman's house, and directed her to rub it into her eyes. She did so and her eyes went out like the flame of a lamp. That physician was Cakkupala."

"Monks, the evil deed then committed by my son followed ever after; for an evil deed follows the evildoer even as a wheel follows the hoof of the ox that bears the yoke."

After relating this story, the King of Righteousness (Dhamma) joined the connection, even as a king seals an edict with the royal seal after the clay has been affixed, and pronounced the following stanza :

Thought is of all things first, thought is of all things foremost,
of thought are all things made.

If with thought corrupt a man speak or act, Suffering follows
him, even as a wheel follows the hoof of the beast of burden.

Translated by
MRS. E. L. CLANCY

SATYAKAMA THE TRUTHFUL

"DEAR mother, what is my gotra or lineage? I wish to go to a guru and offer to live with him as a brahmachari," said young Satyakama one sweet morning to his mother.

He little knew how embarrassing that question was to her. However, she soon overcame her confusion. She knew that the claims of her child for knowledge were supreme. He was already grown up, and to neglect those claims any further would be very culpable. She was well aware that the first thing that any guru would ask her child would be his gotra and parentage.

"Young child," she said, "to tell you the truth, I know not your gotra. While young and wandering as a housemaid serving here and there, I begot you. How then can I know? But I am certain of one thing, and that is that your name is Satyakama and mine Jabala. Therefore go forth and tell your guru that you are Satyakama Jabala." The son agreed and took leave of the mother. He went in search of a teacher who would teach him what he wanted to know.

He approached Haridrumata Gautama, known for his wisdom. After a reverent bow Satyakama informed him of his intention to learn at his feet. As expected, the first question the guru asked was about his gotra.

"What is your gotra, young boy?"

Satyakama said, "Sir, as I started on this journey of mine, I asked this question of my mother." So saying he reported the whole conversation that had taken place between himself and his mother. He finally added, "Thus, here I am, sir, known as Satyakama Jabala."

"Oh, brave and truthful child!" exclaimed the guru. "No one not born of a brahmin would dare tell such an unpleasant truth. Go therefore and bring samidha or sacrificial fuel and I shall initiate you into brahmacharya. You have not departed from the truth, but clung fast to it, happen what may."

After this conversation, there was the usual ceremony of initiation and Satyakama was enrolled as a regular initiate of the asrama.

The guru seemed to be a very hard task-master. One day he summoned Satyakama and put him in charge of four hundred lean, weak and poorly fed cows. He told the young disciple to take the whole lot to the forest, and asked him not to return till they had become a herd of a thousand !

It was one of the duties of a disciple to serve the guru in the way that would best please him.

So out went Satyakama as a cowherd, with his new charge and with a determination to carry out the guru's order.

He lived in the forest, looking after the cows and bulls. But his heart did not give up yearning after truth, and even in the forest he made many friends all of whom had something to teach him; the friendly cows and bulls, the whispering trees and leaves, the singing birds and the bubbling brooks, the sun, the moon and the stars.

Gazing from morn to night at the four quarters of the globe in the peace of the forest-meadows, he felt that all this must be part of a great reality. The friendly leader of the herd, an aged bull, whispered to him, "Yes, all these four comers of the earth are one aspect of Brahman."

At night when the herd slept, as he lit his camp-fire, and the flame danced, it talked to him. The stars and the moon in the vast dome overhead became his friends. They too told him that light and darkness, the solid earth beneath and the domed space above studded with stars were all part of Brahman.



The morning sun kissing the dew-washed flowers, the midday sun drawing the sap from trees and plants, the evening clouds and rainbows reflecting the glory of the setting sun told him that the eye that sees all things, the life that dances in all things, the mind that wonders at beauty and asks endless questions, these too are part of Brahman. He heard of Brahman in the songs of the birds, felt the great presence in the cycle of seasons, and in the birth, growth and decay of life around him. His mind slowly realized Brahman in touch, hearing, speech, sight and taste, in the beating of the heart, in waking and in dreams.

Then one day the leader of the herd came and told him, "We number over a thousand now. Take us to the asrama."

By stages, the party reached the asrama. He went to the teacher and bowed to him respectfully. The teacher was extremely glad to see his dutiful disciple after that long span of time. He looked up, and he had a pleasant surprise when he gazed at the brilliant face of young Satyakama.

Dear young man, you look like one who has known Brahman. Who was it that taught you ? How is it that some agency other than the human has taught you this knowledge ? For no one was with you in that wilderness except those dumb cattle and the dreary tumult of the forest," said the teacher.

The young disciple said with utter humility, "It is you sir, from whom I expect to learn yet fully of the much-coveted knowledge. I have heard that from teachers like you alone can real knowledge be had. So I beseech you to favour me by completing the knowledge that I might have had by your grace through communion with nature." The guru knew that the disciple was ripe and ready for receiving spiritual knowledge. Satyakama stayed for some time more in the asrama. He had already learned much. His guru gave the final touches with his voice of experience. Thus Satyakama succeeded in realizing his dream of acquiring full knowledge of Brahman, the Ultimate Reality.

—*Translated by R. R. DIWAKAR*
from CHHANDOGYA UPANISHAD

EACH IN HIS PLACE IS GREAT

A CERTAIN king was in the habit of asking every sannyasin that came into his country who was the greater man, he who had given up the world and become a sannyasin, or he who lived in the world as a householder ? When some of them asserted that the sannyasin is the greater man, the king demanded that this assertion should be proved and when they could not prove the proposition they were ordered by the king to get married and live as householders.

There came one day a young sannyasin who when he was asked who was the greater man, said, "Each man, O King, is great in his own place." When the king demanded proof, he said, "I will prove this to you if you will come and reside with me for a few days." The king accompanied the sannyasin and came to another kingdom, in the capital of which a great ceremony was going on. There were signs of a great celebration in the streets, the noise of drums and music, the shouts of criers, and they found that a proclamation was being made. The crier proclaimed that the princess, daughter of the king, was about to choose her husband from those assembled before her. All the princes of the neighbourhood had put on their gayest attire and assembled in the hall where the princess was to make her selection. Some of them had attendants who were to enumerate their merits and virtues and the princess was taken round on a splendid throne, stopping before each prince. She carried in her hands a garland of flowers which she would throw around the neck of the prince whom she selected.

The princess had no brother and sister and her husband would be the ruler of the kingdom after her father's death. The sannyasin and our king also went into the hall where the ceremony (the

choosing of her husband) was to take place. The princess' palanquin was stopped before the princes one after another, but she did not care for any one of them. There was, however, another young sannyasin in the assembly who was in the midst of the young men assembled and who outshone all the others by the radiance and splendour of his personality. When the palanquin of the princess came near him, the princess stepped out and threw the garland over his neck. The young sannyasin, however, threw aside the garland exclaiming, "I am not one of the suitors, I am a sannyasin. What is marriage to me ?" The king of the country then came up to the sannyasin and said, "My son, do you realise that you will get half of my kingdom now with my daughter and the whole kingdom after my death ?" Saying this he again placed the garland on the sannyasin's neck. The young man threw it aside again, saying, "I have not come here for a marriage." He quickly walked out of the assembly. The princess, however, had fallen madly in love with the young sannyasin and followed him in order to bring him back. The other sannyasin who had brought our king there proposed that they should follow the pair and they also left the assembly hall. The young sannyasin walked several miles and then entered a forest duly followed by the princess. The sannyasin went into one of the intricate paths in the forest and disappeared. The princess tried to find him out and being unsuccessful in her search she sat down under a tree and began to weep. Our sannyasin and his companion, the king, came there and tried to console her. As it was too dark to find the way out of the forest they proposed that they all should rest under a big tree which stood there and on the next morning proceed to find out the path which would take them out of the forest.

Now a little bird had built a nest on the top of that tree and lived there with his wife and three chicks. Seeing the three persons sitting under the tree, the bird said to his wife that they ought to do something for the guests. As it was winter, he thought of making a fire for the comfort of the guests, and flying out he brought a small quantity of dry grass in his beak and dropped it before them. They soon made good use of it and lighted a blazing fire. Then the little bird again said to his wife, "My dear, these people have nothing to eat; it is our duty to feed anyone that

comes to our house." Saying this, he plunged into the fire and perished. The wife of the bird, also feeling that her husband's body could not provide sufficient food for the guests, fell into the fire. The little chicks decided to follow their parents and all of them plunged headlong into the fire. The three persons at the foot of the tree understood the purpose for which the birds had given up their lives. They could not partake of the food offered by the birds and in the morning the king and the sannyasin showed the princess the way out of the forest to enable her to go back to her father.

Then the sannyasin said to the king, "O king, you have now seen that each is great in his own place. If you want to live in the world, live like these birds who were ready to sacrifice their lives for the sake of others. If you want to renounce the world, be like the young sannyasin to whom the most beautiful woman and a kingdom meant nothing. Each is great in his own place, but the duty of the one is not the duty of the other."

DEVAYANI AND KACHA

IN ancient times, there was a bitter struggle between the devas or gods and the asuras or demons for the lordship of the three worlds. Both belligerents had illustrious preceptors—Brihaspati who was pre-eminent in the knowledge of the Vedas was the guiding spirit of the devas, while the asuras relied on Sukracharya's profound wisdom. The asuras had the formidable advantage that Sukracharya alone possessed the secret of Sanjivini which could recall the dead to life. Thus the asuras who had fallen in the battle were brought back to life, time and again, and continued their fight with the devas. The devas were thus at a great disadvantage in their long-drawn-out war with their natural foes. They went to Kacha, the son of Brihaspati, and besought his aid. They begged him to win his way into the good graces of Sukracharya and persuade him to take him as a pupil. Once admitted to intimacy and confidence, he was to acquire, by fair means or foul, the secret of Sanjivini and remove the great handicap under which the devas suffered.

Kacha acceded to their request and set out to meet Sukracharya who lived in the capital city of Vrishaparva, the king of the asuras. Kacha went to the house of Sukra, and after due salutation, addressed him thus : "I am Kacha, the grandson of the sage Angiras and the son of Brihaspati. I am a brahmacharin seeking knowledge under your tutelage." It was the law that the wise teacher should not refuse a worthy pupil who sought knowledge of him. So Sukra acceded and said : "Kacha, you belong to a good family. I accept you as my pupil, all the more willingly, that by doing so I shall also be showing my respect for Brihaspati."

Kacha spent many years under Sukracharya, rendering to perfection the prescribed duties in the household of his master.

Sukracharya had a lovely daughter, Devayani, of whom he was extremely fond. Kacha devoted himself to pleasing and serving her with song and dance and pastime and succeeded in winning her affection, without detriment however to the vows of brahmacharya.

When the asuras came to know of this, they became anxious as they suspected that Kacha's object was somehow to wheedle out of Sukracharya the secret of Sanjivini. They naturally sought to prevent such a calamity.

One day as Kacha was engaged in grazing the cattle of his master the asuras seized him, tore him to pieces and cast his flesh to the dogs. When the cattle returned without Kacha, Devayani was filled with anxiety, and ran to her father with loud lamentations. "The sun has set," she wailed, "and your nightly fire sacrifice has been performed; still Kacha has not returned home. The cattle have come back by themselves. I fear some mishap has befallen Kacha. I cannot live without him."

The fond father employed the art of Sanjivini and invoked the dead youth to appear. At once Kacha came back to life and greeted the master with smiles. Asked by Devayani the reason for his delay, he told her that as he was grazing the cattle the asuras came suddenly on him and slew him. How he came back to life he knew not, but come back to life he did, and there he was.

On another occasion Kacha went to the forest to pluck flowers for Devayani, and again the asuras seized and killed him, and pounding his body to a paste, mixed it up in sea-water. As he did not return even after a long time, Devayani went as before to her father who brought Kacha back to life by his Sanjivini, and heard from him all that had taken place.

For the third time again, the asuras killed Kacha and very cleverly as they thought, burnt his body, mixed the ashes in wine and served it to Sukracharya who drank it, suspecting nothing. Once more the cows returned home without their keeper, and once again Devayani approached her father with her distressful appeal for Kacha.

Sukracharya tried in vain to console his daughter.

"Though I have again and again brought back Kacha to life," said he, "the asuras seem bent upon killing him. Well, death is the common lot, and it is not proper for a wise soul like you to sorrow at it. Your life is all before you to enjoy, with youth and beauty and the goodwill of the world."

Devayani deeply loved Kacha; and since the world began, wise saws have never cured the ache of bereavement. She said : "Kacha, the grandson of Angiras and the son of Brihaspati, was a blameless boy, who was devoted and tireless in our service. I loved him dearly, and now that he has been killed, life to me has become bleak and insupportable. I shall therefore follow in his path." And Devayani began to fast.

Sukracharya, heart-stricken by his daughter's sorrow, became very angry with the asuras, and felt that the heinous sin of killing a brahmana would weigh heavily on their fortunes. He employed the Sanjivini art and called upon Kacha to appear. By the power of the Sanjivini, Kacha dispersed as he was in the wine which was inside Sukracharya's body at the time, regained life, but prevented by the peculiarity of his location from coming out, he could only answer to his name from where he was. Sukracharya exclaimed in angry amazement : "O brahmacharin, how did you get into me ? Is this also the work of the asuras ? This is really too bad and makes me feel like killing the asuras immediately and joining the devas. But tell me the whole story." Kacha narrated it all, in spite of the inconvenience imposed by his position.

The high-souled and austere Sukracharya of immeasurable greatness became angry at the deceit practised on him in his wine, and proclaimed for the benefit of humanity :

"Virtue will desert the man who through lack of wisdom drinks wine. He will be an object of scorn to all. This is my message to humanity, which should be regarded as an imperative scriptural injunction."

Then he turned to his daughter Devayani and said "Dear daughter, here is a problem for you. If Kacha should live he must

rend my stomach and come out of it, and that means death to me. His life can only be bought by my death."

Devayani began to weep and said : "Alas ! it is death to me either way—for if either of you perish, I shall not survive."

It was now that the real explanation of it all flashed on Sukracharya, as he thought of the only way out of the difficulty. He said to Kacha : "O son of Brihaspati, I now see with what object you came ... and verily you have secured it! I must bring you out to life for the sake of Devayani, but in doing this Devayani would not have me die either. The only way is to initiate you in the art of Sanjivini so that you can bring me back to life after I shall have died when a way is torn out through my entrails for you. You should employ the knowledge I am going to impart to you and revive me, so that Devayani need not grieve for either of us." Accordingly, Sukracharya imparted the art of Sanjivini to Kacha. Immediately Kacha came forth from Sukracharya's body emerging like the full moon from a cloud, and that great preceptor fell down mangled and dead.

But Kacha at once brought Sukracharya back to life by means of his newly acquired Sanjivini. Kacha bowed down to Sukracharya and said : "The teacher who imparts wisdom to the ignorant is a father. Besides, as I have issued from your body, you are my mother too."

Kacha remained for many years more under the tutelage of Sukracharya. When the period of his vow ended, he took leave of his master to return to the world of the gods. As he was about to depart, Devayani humbly addressed him thus : "O grandchild of Angiras, you have won my heart by your blameless life, your great attainments and nobility of birth. I have loved you long and tenderly even while you were faithfully following your vows of a brahmacharin. You should now reciprocate my love and make me happy by marrying me. Brihaspati as well as yourself are fully worthy of being honoured by me."

In those days, it was no uncommon thing for wise and learned brahmana ladies to speak out their mind with honourable frankness. But Kacha said :



"O Faultless One, you are my master's daughter and ever worthy of my respect. I got back my life by being born out of your father's body. Hence I am your brother. It is not proper for you, my sister, to ask me to wed you."

Devayani sought in vain to persuade him. "You are the son of Brihaspati," said she, "and not of my father. If I have been the cause of your coming back to life, it was because I loved you—as indeed I have always loved you and wanted you as my husband. It is not fit that you should give up one like me, sinless and devoted to you."

Kacha replied : "Do not seek to persuade me to unrighteousness. You are enchanting—more so than ever now that you are angry. But I am your brother. Pray bid me adieu. Serve unto perfection, ever and always, my master Sukracharya." With these words, Kacha gently disengaged himself and proceeded to the abode of Indra, the king of gods.

Sukracharya consoled his daughter.

—C. RAJAGOPALACHARI

YAYATI

EMPEROR Yayati was one of the ancestors of the Pandavas. He had never known defeat. He followed the dictates of the sastras, adored the gods and venerated his ancestors with intense devotion. He became famous as a ruler devoted to the welfare of his subjects.

He became prematurely old by the curse of Sukracharya for having wronged his wife Devayani. In the words of the poet of the *Mahabharata*: "Yayati attained that old age which destroys beauty and brings on miseries." It is needless to describe the misery of vigorous youth suddenly blighted into age, where the horrors of loss are accentuated by pangs of recollection.

Yayati who found himself suddenly an old man was still haunted by the desire for sensual enjoyment. He had five beautiful sons, all virtuous and accomplished. Yayati called them and appealed piteously to their affection : "The curse of your grandfather Sukracharya has made me unexpectedly and prematurely old. I have not had my fill of the joys of life; for not knowing what was in store for me I lived a life of restraint, denying myself even lawful pleasures. One of you ought to bear the burden of my old age and give his youth in return. He who agrees to this and bestows his youth on me will be the ruler of my kingdom. I desire to enjoy life in the full vigour of youth."

He first asked his eldest son to do his bidding. That son replied: "O great king, women and servants will mock at me if I were to take upon myself your old age. I cannot do so. Ask of my younger brothers who are dearer to you than myself."

When the second son was asked, he gently refused with the words : "Father, you ask me to take up old age which destroys not



only strength and beauty but also—as I see— wisdom. I am not strong enough to do so."

The third son replied : "An old man cannot ride a horse or an elephant. His speech will falter. What can I do in such a helpless plight ? I cannot agree."

The king grew angry when he saw that his three sons had declined to do as he wished. He hoped for better from his fourth son, to whom he said : "You should take up my old age. If you exchange your youth with me, I shall give it back to you after some time and take back the old age with which I have been cursed."

The fourth son begged to be forgiven, as this was a thing he could by no means consent to. An old man had to seek the help of others even to keep his body clean, a most pitiful plight. No, much as he loved his father, he could not do it.

Yayati was struck with sorrow at the refusal of the four sons. He paused for some time and then supplicated his last son who had never yet opposed his wishes : "You must save me. I have got this old age with its wrinkles, debility and grey hairs as a result of the curse of Sukracharya. I cannot bear it. If you will take upon yourself these infirmities, I shall enjoy life for just a while more and then give you back your youth and resume my old age and all its sorrows. Pray, do not refuse as your elder brothers have done." Puru, the youngest son, moved by filial love, said : "Father, I gladly give you my youth and relieve you of the sorrows of old age and the cares of State. Be happy." Hearing these words Yayati embraced him. As soon as he touched his son, Yayati became a youth. Puru, who accepted the old age of his father, ruled the kingdom and acquired great renown.

Yayati enjoyed life for long and not satisfied, went later to the garden of Kubera and spent many years with an apsara maiden. After long years spent in vain efforts to quench desire by indulgence, the truth dawned on him. Returning to Puru, he said :

"Dear son, sensual desire is never quenched by indulgence, any more than fire is by pouring ghee in it. I had heard and read

this, but till now I had not realised it. No object of desire—corn, gold, cattle and women—nothing can ever satisfy the desires of man. We can reach peace only by a mental poise beyond likes and dislikes. Such is the state of Brahman. Take back your youth and rule the kingdom wisely and well."

With these words Yayati took back his old age. Puru who regained his youth was made king by Yayati who retired to the forest. He spent his time there in austerities and in due course attained heaven.

—C. RAJAGOPALACHARI

THE STORY OF CHITRAKETU

HUMAN birth is indeed a blessed birth, because it is an evolution into self-consciousness which gives the incentive to all further growth. Man alone is able to know the highest Truth and attain perfection; but alas, how few men even try to know what is good for them! Fewer have any desire for freedom; and fewer still learn the Truth and become free. Rare indeed are the calm souls who have realized the highest good by uniting their hearts with God.

There is an ancient story to illustrate the truth.

Once there lived in Surasena a well-known king named Chitraketu. Every longing of his heart was fulfilled—save one; but, not having this, he was unhappy. Neither his vast wealth, nor his beautiful wife, nor his youthful vigour, nor his many mistresses, could satisfy him. He desired a son.

One day the great sage, Angira, visited the court, and observing that the king was sad at heart, addressed him thus, seeking the reason for his sorrow :

"He who has conquered his own mind has conquered the universe. You look sad : it appears that you have some unfulfilled desire."

With deep respect for the sage the king replied :

"Revered master, you are a great yogi. You have burnt all your impurities in the fire of yoga. You have become omniscient, and you know the innermost thoughts of all. You therefore know my thoughts and desires, but since you wish me to express them, I will do so : I have everything that a man can desire except that which would complete my happiness. I have no son." The sage Angira felt pity for the king and blessed him and his queen. As the

sage was leaving, he said, "You shall have a son born to you. O king, but he will cause you much grief as well as happiness."

In due course a son was born to him, and King Chitraketu's joy knew no bounds. There was gladness in the hearts of all. But the gladness soon turned into sorrow when one day the nurse found the child lying dead. He had been poisoned by the jealous mistresses of the king.

The king's anguish was unbearable. And now once again the sage Angira, accompanied this time by the divine seer Narada, came before him, and said :

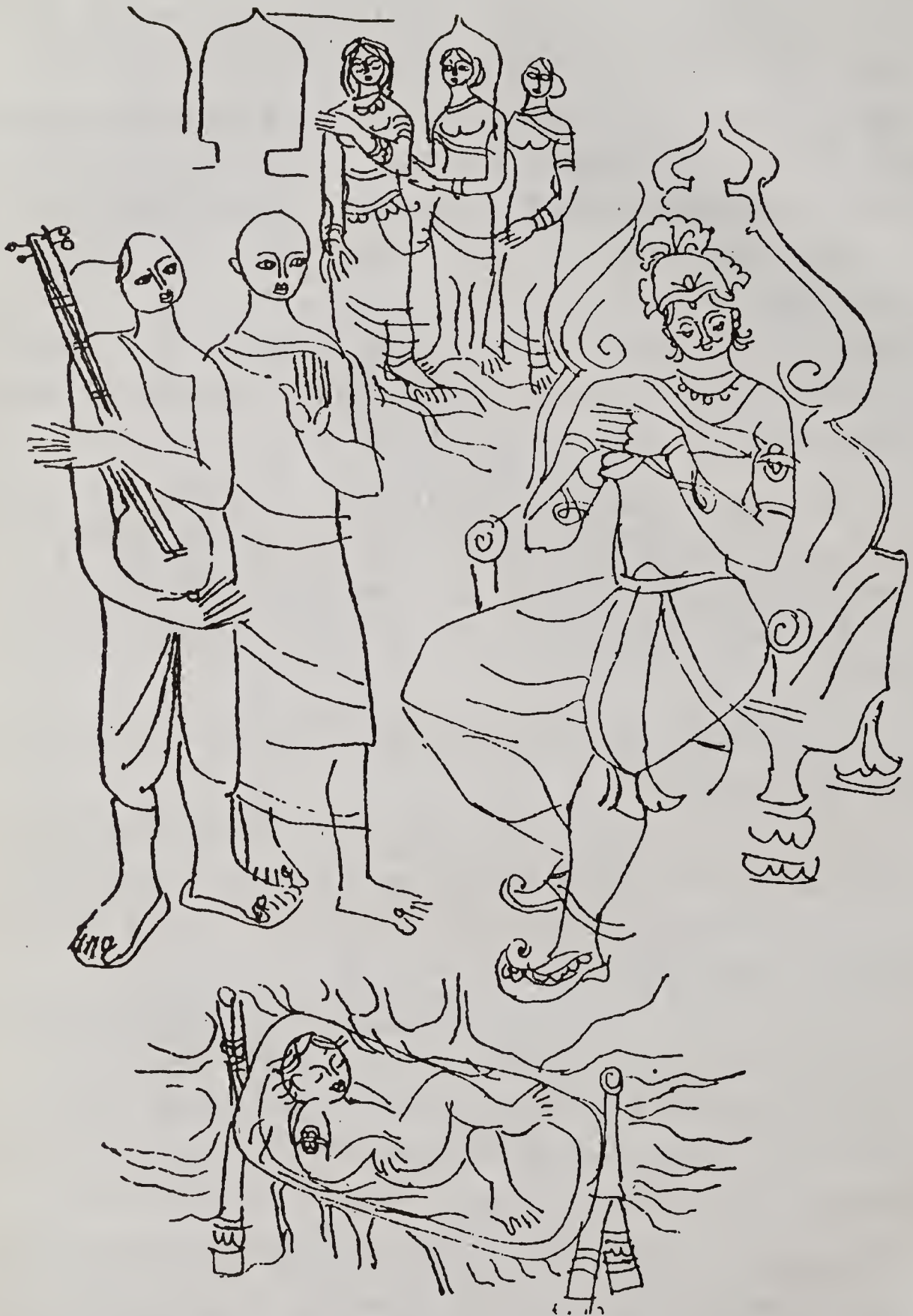
"For whom art thou, grieving, O king ? He whom thou didst call thy son is not dead. Like sand in a river, souls, carried by the stream of time, meet one another, and are swept apart. There is birth and there is death only for the bodies of man. The soul is immortal."

King Chitraketu felt greatly calmed in the presence of the two great sages, and said :

"Who are you, O holy men ? Sages like you wander about the earth shedding the light of knowledge and peace wherever there is unrest and ignorance. Deign to shed that light upon me that all my ignorance may disappear."

"I am he," said Angira, "who blessed you with the child. The divine sage Narada has come to give you his blessing also. We learned of the death of your beloved son and knew that you had been thrown into darkness because of your sorrow. You are a great devotee of the God of Love. You must not grieve thus.

"I might have granted you the highest illumination when I came to see you before, but then your only desire was for a son, and so I blessed you with a child. Now you have learned what it means to desire a son. Everything in life is transitory. Wealth, health, family, children, all are but a vanishing dream. All sorrow and grief are caused by attachment to them and desire for them. Even sorrow and grief, and delusion and fear are transitory.



"Give up belief in the myriad opposites of life. Learn to discriminate. Know the one Truth alone and find peace.

"I am giving you a sacred *mantram*, the name of God. Repeat the *mantram* and meditate on it. Meditate on God with a self-controlled and concentrated mind, and you will soon rise above all sorrow and find ineffable peace."

Then the spirit of the dead child appeared to the divine sage. Narada, who entreated him to re-enter his dead body, live the allotted span of life on earth, and gladden the hearts of his parents and friends.

But the spirit replied :

"Who is my mother ? Who is my father ? I have neither birth nor death. I am the eternal spirit. The, soul, subject to *karma*, travels through many births and many forms. Caged in bodies, he is compelled through ignorance to experience the various earthly relationships. But I have known myself as the unchangeable, birthless and deathless spirit. I am he, the eternal spirit, who forever remains untouched, unaffected by the love or hatred, good or evil of this universe. I am the eternal Witness. I am HE !"

Then the spirit disappeared. A sense of freedom from attachment and grief came to the sorrowing parents, and they performed the last rites for the dead body of their child.

Consoled by the wisdom of Narada and Angira, King Chitraketu prostrated himself at the feet of these divine sages. They had brought to him that knowledge which gives peace. Narada then initiated him into the sacred mysteries of meditation and taught him the following prayer :

“We bow down to Thee:
 Supreme bliss is Thy form;
 Intelligence itself is Thy nature;
 Thou art peace, and Thy delight is in Thyself;
 Thou art beyond all human consciousness.
 "Thou dost experience thine own bliss;
 Attachment, delusion, or the working of Thine own maya
 does not affect Thee;
 Thou art supreme, the Lord of the senses and of all objects;
 Thy faces are infinite. We salute Thee.
 Where the mind and the senses seek in vain to reach
 Thee,
 There art thou expressed in Thy divine glory;
 Thou art nameless and formless;
 Life and consciousness art Thou,

The cause of all causes.

Do Thou protect us and guide us.

"Like the all-pervading ether,
Thou art everywhere and within all;
Yet we know Thee not.

The senses, mind, and intellect are astir with conscious life,
Because of the borrowed light of Thy consciousness—

Even as iron gives out heat when it is near the fire.

One realizes Thee by going beyond the senses, the mind, and
the intellect.

May our hearts be drawn to Thee !"

King Chitraketu began to practise the spiritual lessons taught him by the divine sages Angira and Narada. Soon his mind was illumined, and he had the vision of the God of Love. He felt overwhelming joy in his heart, and attained peace and tranquillity.

As he continued his practices there came greater and greater illumination, and he ultimately realized his unity with Brahman.

FORGIVENESS

ON the sky, the moon drifted slowly through the clouds. Far below, the river mingled its murmur with the wind's, as it danced along on its course; and the earth looked bathed in beauty in the half-light of the moon. All around were the forest retreats of the Rishis, each charming enough to put the Elysian fields to shame : every hermitage was a perfect picture of sylvan loveliness with its trees and flowers and foliage. On this moon-enraptured night, said Brahmaṛshi (the seer who has known the Supreme) Vasishtha to his spouse Arundhati Devi, "Devi (*literacy* goddess), go and beg some salt of the Rishi Vishvamiṭra, and bring it here soon."

Taken aback, she replied, "My lord, what is this you are asking me to do ? I cannot understand you ! He who has robbed me of my hundred sons..." She could say no more, for her voice was choked with sobs as memories of the past rose up to disturb that sweet home of serenity, her heart, and to fill it with pain to its depths. After a time she recovered her composure to continue : "All my hundred sons were learned in the Vedas and dedicated to the Divine. They would go about in moonlight such as this, singing His praises, but he... he has destroyed them all. And you bid me go and beg at his door for a little salt! My lord, you bewilder me!" Slowly the sage's face filled with light; slowly from the ocean-depths of his heart came the words, "But Devi, I love him!" Arundhati's bewilderment increased, and she said, "If you love him - you might just as well have addressed him as Brahmaṛshi! The trouble would have ended there, and I should have had my hundred sons left to me."

The Rishi's face took on a singular beauty as he said, "It was because I love him that I did not call him Brahmaṛshi. It was because I did not call him that, that he still has a chance of

becoming a Brahmarshi." Vishvamitra was beside himself with rage. He could not concentrate on his *tapasya*. He had vowed that if Vasishtha did not acknowledge him as a Brahmarshi that day, he would kill him. To carry out this resolve, he had armed himself with a sword as he left his hermitage.

Slowly as he came to Vasishthadeva's cottage he stood outside, listening. He heard what the great sage was saying to Devi Arundhati about him. The grip on his sword-hilt relaxed as he thought, "Heavens, what was I about to do in my ignorance ! To think of trying to hurt one whose soul is so far above all pettiness!"

He felt the sting of a hundred bees in his conscience and ran forward and fell at Vasishtha's feet. For a time he could not speak, but in a little while he recovered his speech and said, "Pardon me, oh, pardon me ! But I am unworthy even of your mercy!"

He could say no more, for his pride still held him fast. But Vasishtha stretched out both arms to raise him. "Rise Brahmarshi," he gently said. But Vishvamitra, in his shame and mortification, could not believe that Vasishtha meant what he said.

"Do not deride me, my lord," he cried.

"I never say what is false," replied Vasishtha. "You have become a Brahmarshi today. You have earned that status because you have shed your haughty self-conceit."

"Teach me divine lore, then," implored Vishvamitra.

"Go to Anantadeva, he will give you what you desire," said Vasishtha.

Vishvamitra came to where Anantadeva stood with the Earth resting on his head. "Yes, I will teach you what you want to learn. But, first you must hold up the Earth."

Proud of his *tapasya-won* powers, Vishvamitra said, "Very well, relinquish your burden and let me bear it."

"Hold it then," said Anantadeva, moving away. And the Earth

began to spin down and down in space.

"Here and now I give up all the fruits of my *tapasya*," shouted Vishvamitra, "only let the Earth not sink downwards."

"You have not done *tapasya* enough to hold up the Earth, O Vishvamitra," Anantadeva shouted back. "Have you ever associated with holy men ? If you have, offer up the merit you have so acquired."

"For a moment only, I was with Vasishtha," answered Vishvamitra.

"Offer up the fruits of that contact then," commanded Anantadeva.

"I do here offer them up," said Vishvamitra. Slowly the Earth stopped sinking downwards.

"Give me divine knowledge, now," importuned Vishvamitra.

"Fool!" exclaimed Anantadeva, "You come to me for divine knowledge, turning away from him whose momentary touch has given you virtue enough to hold up the Earth !" Vishvamitra grew angry at the thought that Vasishthadeva had played him a trick. So he hurried back to him and demanded why he had deceived him. Unruffled, Vasishtha answered him in slow and solemn tones : "If I had given you the knowledge you asked for then, you would not have accepted it as true. Now you will have faith in me." And so Vishvamitra came to acquire knowledge of the Divine from Vasishtha. Such were the saints and sages of India in the olden days, and such was their Ideal of Forgiveness. So great was the power they had acquired by their *tapasya* that they could even carry the Earth on their shoulders. Such sages are born in India again, today. They will dim the lustre of the Rishis of old by their radiance and confer on India a glory greater than any she has ever known.

—Translated by SOMNATH MAITRA from the
original Bengali by SRI AUROBINDO
Courtesy : the advent

THE ENCHANTED POOL

THE stipulated period of twelve years was drawing to a close.

One day a deer was rubbing itself against a poor Brahmana's fire-kindling mortar and as it turned to go, the mortar got entangled in its horns and the affrighted animal fled wildly with it into the forest. In those days matches were unknown and fire was kindled with pieces of wood by mechanical friction.

"Alas ! the deer is running away with my fire-kindler, How can I perform the fire sacrifice ?" shouted the Brahmana and rushed towards the Pandavas for help in his extremity.

The Pandavas pursued the animal but it was a magic deer which sped in great leaps and bounds, decoying the Pandavas far into the forest and then disappeared. Worn out by the futile chase, the Pandavas sat in great dejection under a banyan tree. Nakula lamented : "We cannot render even this trifling service to the Brahmana. How we have degenerated!"

Bhima said : "Quite so. When Draupadi was dragged into the assembly we should have killed those wretches. Is it not because we did not do so that we have had to suffer all these sorrows ?" and he looked at Arjuna sorrowfully.

Arjuna agreed. "I bore in silence the vulgar and insulting brag of that son of the charioteer, doing nothing. So we have deservedly fallen into this pitiable state."

Yudhishtira noticed with sorrow that all of them had lost their cheerfulness and courage. He thought they would be more cheerful with something to do. He was tormented with thirst and so he said to Nakula: "Brother, climb that tree and see whether there is any pool or river nearby."

Nakula climbed the tree, looked around and said : "At a little distance I see water plants and cranes. There must certainly be water there."

Yudhishtira sent him to fetch some to drink.

Nakula was glad when he got to the place and saw there was a pool. He was very thirsty himself and so thought of quenching his thirst first before taking water in his quiver for his brother; but no sooner did he dip his hand in the transparent water than he heard a voice which said :

"Do not be rash. This pool belongs to me. O son of Madri, answer my questions and then drink the water."

Nakula was surprised, but carried away by his intense thirst and heedless of the warning, he drank the water. At once, overcome by irresistible drowsiness, he fell down and died. Surprised that Nakula had not returned, Yudhishtira sent Sahadeva to see what the matter was. When Sahadeva reached the pool and saw his brother lying on the ground, he wondered whether any harm had come to him, but before looking into the matter further rushed irresistibly to the water to quench his burning thirst.

The voice was heard again : "O Sahadeva, this is my pool. Answer my questions and then only may you quench your thirst."

Like Nakula, Sahadeva also did not heed the warning. He drank the water and at once dropped down dead. Puzzled and worried that Sahadeva also did not return, Yudhishtira sent Arjuna to see whether the brothers had met with any danger. "And bring water," he added, for he was very thirsty.

Arjuna went swiftly. He saw both his brothers lying dead near the pool. He was shocked at the sight and felt that they must have been killed by some lurking foe. Though heart-broken with grief and burning with the desire for revenge, he felt all feelings else submerged in a monstrous thirst which irresistibly impelled him to the fatal pool. Again a voice was heard : "Answer my questions before you drink the water. This pool is mine. If you disobey me, you will follow your brothers."

Arjuna's anger knew no bounds. He cried : "Who are you ? Come and stand up to me, and I will kill you," and he shot keen-edged arrows in the direction of the voice. The invisible being laughed in scorn : "Your arrows do but wound the air. Answer my questions and then you can satisfy your thirst. If you drink the water without doing so, you will die."

Greatly vexed, Arjuna made up his mind to seek out and grapple with this elusive foe, but first he must quench his terrible thirst. Yes, thirst was the enemy he must kill first. So he drank the water and he also fell down dead.

After anxious waiting, Yudhishtira turned to Bhima : Dear brother, Arjuna, the great hero, has also not yet returned. Something terrible must have happened to our brothers, for our stars are bad. Please seek them out and be quick about it. Also bring water, for I die of thirst." Bhima, racked with anxiety, hurried away without a word.

His grief and rage can be imagined when he saw his three brothers lying there dead. He thought : "This is certainly the work of the yakshas. I will hunt them down and kill them, but O ! I am so thirsty, I shall first drink water the better to fight them." And then he descended into the pool.

The voice shouted: "Bhimasena, beware. You may drink only after answering my questions. You will die if you disregard my words."

"Who are you to dictate to me ?" cried Bhima, and he drank the water avidly, glaring around in defiance. And as he did so, his great strength seemed to slip from him like a garment, and he also fell dead among his brothers.

Lone, Yudhishtira wailed in a hell of anxiety and thirst. "Have they been subjected to a curse or are they wandering about in the forest in a vain search for water or have they fainted or died of thirst ?" Unable to bear these thoughts and driven desperate by an overpowering thirst, he started out to look for his brothers and the pool. Yudhishtira proceeded in the direction his brothers had taken through tracts infested with wild boars, spotted deer and

huge forest birds, and presently came upon a beautiful green meadow, girdling a pool of pellucid water, nectar to his eyes. But when he saw his brothers lying there like sacred flagpoles thrown pell-mell after a festival, unable to restrain his grief, he lifted his voice and wept.



He stroked the faces of Bhima and Arjuna as they lay so still and silent there and mourned : "Was this to be the end of all our vows ? Just when our exile is about to end, you have passed away. Even the gods have forsaken me in my misfortune!"

As he looked at their mighty limbs, now so helpless, he sadly wondered who could have been powerful enough to kill them. Brokenly he reflected : "Surely my heart must be made of steel not to break even after seeing Nakula and Sahadeva lying dead. For what purpose should I continue to live in this world ?" Then a sense of mystery overcame him, for this could be no ordinary occurrence. The world held no warriors who could overcome his brothers; besides, there were no wounds on their bodies which could have let out life and their faces were faces of men who slept in peace and not of those who died in wrath. There was also no trace of the footprints of an enemy. There was surely some magic about it. Or, could it be a trick played by Duryodhana ?

Might he not have poisoned the water ? Then Yudhishtira also descended into the pool, in his turn drawn to the water by a consuming thirst. At once the voice without form warned as before "Your brothers died because they did not heed my words. Do not follow them. Answer my questions first and then quench your thirst. This pool is mine."

Yudhishtira knew that these could be none other than the words of a yaksha and guessed what had happened to his brothers. He saw a possible way of redeeming the situation. He said to the bodiless voice : "Please ask your questions."

The voice put questions rapidly one after another.

It asked : "What makes the sun shine every day?"

Yudhishtira replied : "The power of Brahman."

"What rescues man in danger ?"

"Courage is man's salvation in danger."

"By the study of which science does man become wise ?"

"Not by studying any sastra does man become wise. It is by

association with the great in wisdom that he gets wisdom." The yaksha asked : "What is more nobly sustaining than the earth ?"

Yudhishtira replied : "The mother who brings up the children she has borne is nobler and more sustaining than the earth."

"What is higher than the sky?"

"The father."

"What is fleeter than wind ?"

"Mind."

"What is more blighted than withered straw ?"

"A sorrow-stricken heart."

"What befriends a traveller ?"

"Learning."

"Who is the friend of one who stays at home ?"

"The wife."

"Who accompanies a man in death ?"

"Dharma. That alone accompanies the soul in its so journey after death."

"Which is the biggest vessel ?"

"The earth which contains all within itself is the greatest vessel."

"What is happiness ?"

"Happiness is the result of good conduct."

"What is that, abandoning which man becomes loved by all ?"

"Pride—for abandoning that man will be loved by all."

"What is the loss which yields joy and not sorrow ?"

"Anger—giving it up, we will no longer be subject to sorrow."

"What is that, by giving up which man becomes rich ?"

"Desire—getting rid of it, man becomes wealthy."

"What makes one a real Brahmana ? Is it birth, good conduct or learning ? Answer decisively."

"Birth and learning do not make one a Brahmana. Good conduct alone does. However learned a person may be, he will not be a Brahmana if he is a slave to bad habits. Even though he may be learned in the four Vedas, a man of bad conduct falls to a lower class."

"What is the greatest wonder in the world ?"

"Every day men see creatures depart to Yama's abode and yet those who remain seek to live for ever. This verily is the greatest wonder."

Thus, the yaksha posed many questions and Yudhishtra answered them all.

In the end the yaksha asked : "O king, one of your dead brothers can now be revived. Whom do you want revived ? He shall come back to life."

Yudhishtira thought for a moment and then replied :

"May the cloud-complexioned, lotus-eyed, broad-chested and long-armed Nakula, lying like a fallen ebony tree, arise."

The yaksha was pleased at this and asked Yudhishtira :

"Why did you choose Nakula in preference to Bhima who has the strength of sixteen thousand elephants? I have heard that Bhima is most dear to you. And why not Arjuna, whose prowess in arms is your protection ? Tell me why you chose Nakula rather than either of these two."

Yudhishtira replied : "O yaksha, dharma is the only shield of man and not Bhima or Arjuna. If dharma is set at naught, man will be ruined. Kunti and Madri were the two wives of my father. I am surviving, a son of Kunti, and so she is not completely bereaved. In order that the scales of justice may be even I ask that Madri's son Nakula may revive."

The yaksha was pleased with Yudhishtira's impartiality and granted that all his brothers would come back to life.

It was Yama, the Lord of Death, who had taken the form of the deer and the yaksha, so that he might see his son Yudhishtira and test him. He embraced Yudhishtira and blessed him.

Yama said : "Only a few days remain to complete the stipulated period of your exile in the forest. The thirteenth year will also pass by. None of your enemies will be able to discover you. You will successfully fulfil your undertaking," and saying this, he disappeared.

The Pandavas had, no doubt, to pass through all sorts of troubles during their exile, but the gains too were not inconsiderable. It was a period of hard discipline and searching probation through which they emerged stronger and nobler men. Arjuna returned from *tapas* with divine weapon; strengthened by contact with Indra. Bhima also met his elder brother Hanuman near the lake where the Saugandhika flowers bloomed and got tenfold strength by his embrace. Having met at the enchanted pool his father Yama, the Lord of Dharma, Yudhishtira, shone with tenfold lustre.

"The minds of those who listen to the sacred story of Yudhishtira's meeting with his father will never go after evil. They will never seek to create quarrels among friends or covet the wealth of others. They will never fall victims to lust. They will never be unduly attached to transitory things." Thus said Vaisampayana to Janamejaya as he related this story of the yaksha. May the same good attend the readers of this story as retold by us.

—C. RAJAGOPALACHARI

THE STORY OF SHIBI RANA

THERE was a certain king whose name was Shibi Rana, and his power was so great, and grew so rapidly, that the gods in high heaven began to tremble, lest he should take their kingdoms away from them. Then they thought of a stratagem by which to test his self-control, and humble him by proving his weakness. For in the eyes of the gods only that man is invincible who is perfectly master of himself.

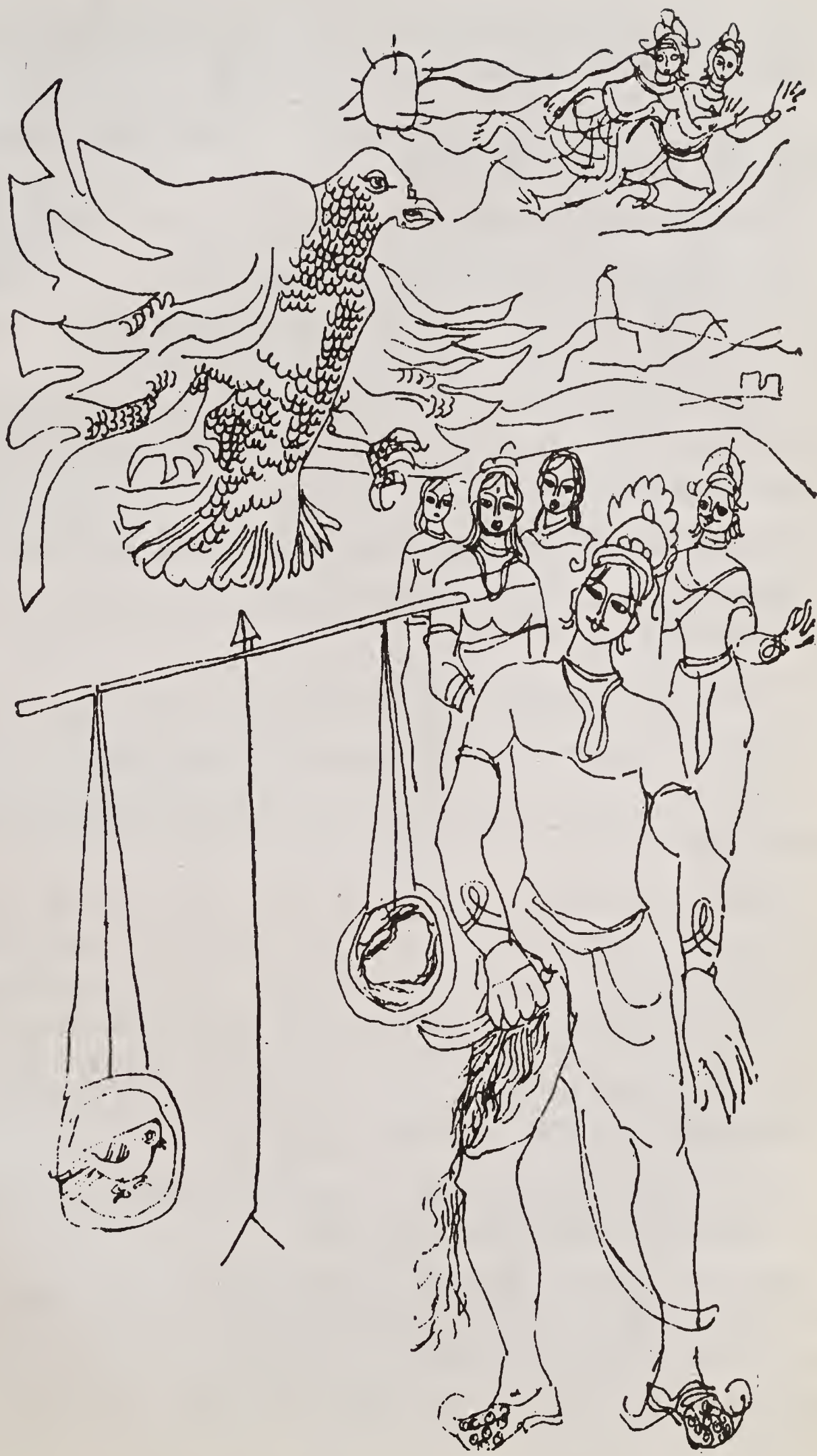
One day, as Shibi Rana sat on his throne in his pillared hall, with the open courtyard and its gardens and fountains stretching far beyond, there appeared high up in the air, flying straight towards him, a white dove, pursued by an eagle, who was evidently trying to kill it. Fast as the dove flew in its terror, the eagle flew faster. But just as it was on the point of being captured, the smaller bird reached the throne of Shibi Rana; the King opened his robe, and without a moment's hesitation it fluttered in, and nestled, panting and trembling, against his heart.

Then the eagle's flight came to a stop before the throne, and his whole form seemed so to blaze with anger that every one trembled except the monarch, and no one felt the slightest surprise at hearing him speak.

"Surrender my prey!" he commanded in a loud voice, facing the King.

"Nay," said Shibi Rana quietly, "the dove has taken refuge with me, and I shall not betray its trust."

"This, then, is your vaunted mercy!" sneered the eagle. "This dove that you have sheltered was to have been my food. You show your power by protecting it, and you starve me. Is such your intention?"



"Not at all," said the King, "in fact, I will give you in its place an equal quantity of any other food you choose."

"Of any other food?" said the eagle mockingly. "But suppose I asked for your own flesh."

"My own flesh should be given," said Shibi Rana firmly.

A harsh laugh sounded through the hall, startling those who were standing about the throne; but when they looked again at the face of the bird, his eye was steady and piercing as before.

"Then I require," said he, speaking slowly and deliberately, "that this dove be weighed in the balance against an equal weight of the King's flesh."

"It shall be done," said Shibi Rana motioning for the scales.

"Stay!" said the eagle, "the flesh must be cut from the right side of the body only."

"That is easily granted," said the King with a smile.

"And your wife and son must be present at the sacrifice"

"Bring the Queen and my son into our presence," said the King to an officer.

So the witnesses took their places, the balance was brought, and the dove was placed on one side, while the executioner prepared to carry out the horrible order. As he proceeded, however, it was found, to the dismay of the whole court, that with each addition of the King's flesh the dove grew heavier, and the weights of the two could not be made equal. Then, at last, from the left eye of Shibi Rana there fell a single tear.

"Stop!" thundered the eagle, "I want no unwilling sacrifice. Your tears destroy the value of your gift."

"Nay, my friend," said the King gently, turning on the eagle a face radiant with joy, "nay, my friend, you are mistaken; it is only that the left side weeps, because on behalf of the weak and unprotected, it is given to the right side of the King alone to suffer!"

At these words, startling all who heard them, the forms of the eagle and the dove were seen to have vanished, and in their places stood Indra, the Chief of the Gods, and Agni, the God of Fire. And the voice of Indra was hushed with reverence as he said, "Against greatness like that of Shibi Rana, the gods themselves shall struggle but in vain. Blessed be thou, O King, Protector of the Unprotected, who burnest with the joy of sacrifice ! For to such souls must the very gods do homage, yielding to them a place above themselves."

—SISTER NIVEDITA

THE RABBIT IN THE MOON

LONG years ago, and far away in the land where the Buddha was born, there lived in a deep mountain forest a monkey, a fox and a rabbit. They were close friends and dwelt together in perfect harmony. It happened once that God came to earth from Heaven, disguised as a beggar. He wandered through villages, towns, and cities, but mankind was not friendly to him. Men offered him nothing. By chance, he heard from a fellow beggar of the three animal friends of the forest, and he decided to pay them a visit.

At the entrance to the forest, there was a large stone. Here, the beggar, being hungry and tired, sat down to rest. Just then, the monkey, the fox and the rabbit came out of the forest. The beggar said to them, "My dear friends, have pity on me. I am a very poor man, and it is long since I have eaten. I have heard that you are more friendly and benevolent than human beings; so please help me !"

Hearing this, the three friends were moved with pity for the poor man. The monkey ran quickly away, and returning with many kinds of fruit from the forest, gave them to the beggar. The fox hurried to a nearby river, caught some fish and brought them to the poor man. The rabbit ran from one part of the forest to the other but returned empty-handed.

The beggar, seeing this, said to the rabbit, "Mr. Rabbit, I had heard that you would be as friendly as the monkey, and as helpful as the fox. Pray, bring me something !"

"Excuse me, Sir!" said the rabbit, "I indeed have sympathy with you, and feel pity for you as much as my friends. No but what can I do ? I have not the talent and wisdom that they have, and it grieves me greatly."



With this, the rabbit's expression changed. He seemed to be thinking deeply, and then he suddenly seemed to make up his mind. "My friends," he said to the monkey and the fox, "make haste, and bring dry twigs out of the forest and pile them here. The friends did as he bade them, and built up a pile of fuel. Then the rabbit asked the fox to set fire to it. This done, he embraced

his two friends, and suddenly, before they knew what was happening, he leapt into the flames, saying to the beggar, "Dear traveller, I could do nothing for you. Please wait till my body is nicely roasted, then take it out and eat it!"

The beggar was completely taken aback and was full of sorrow for the poor, good rabbit. Taking the half-roasted body out of the fire, he pressed it against his heart, and to the complete astonishment of the monkey and the fox, ascended with it to the skies.

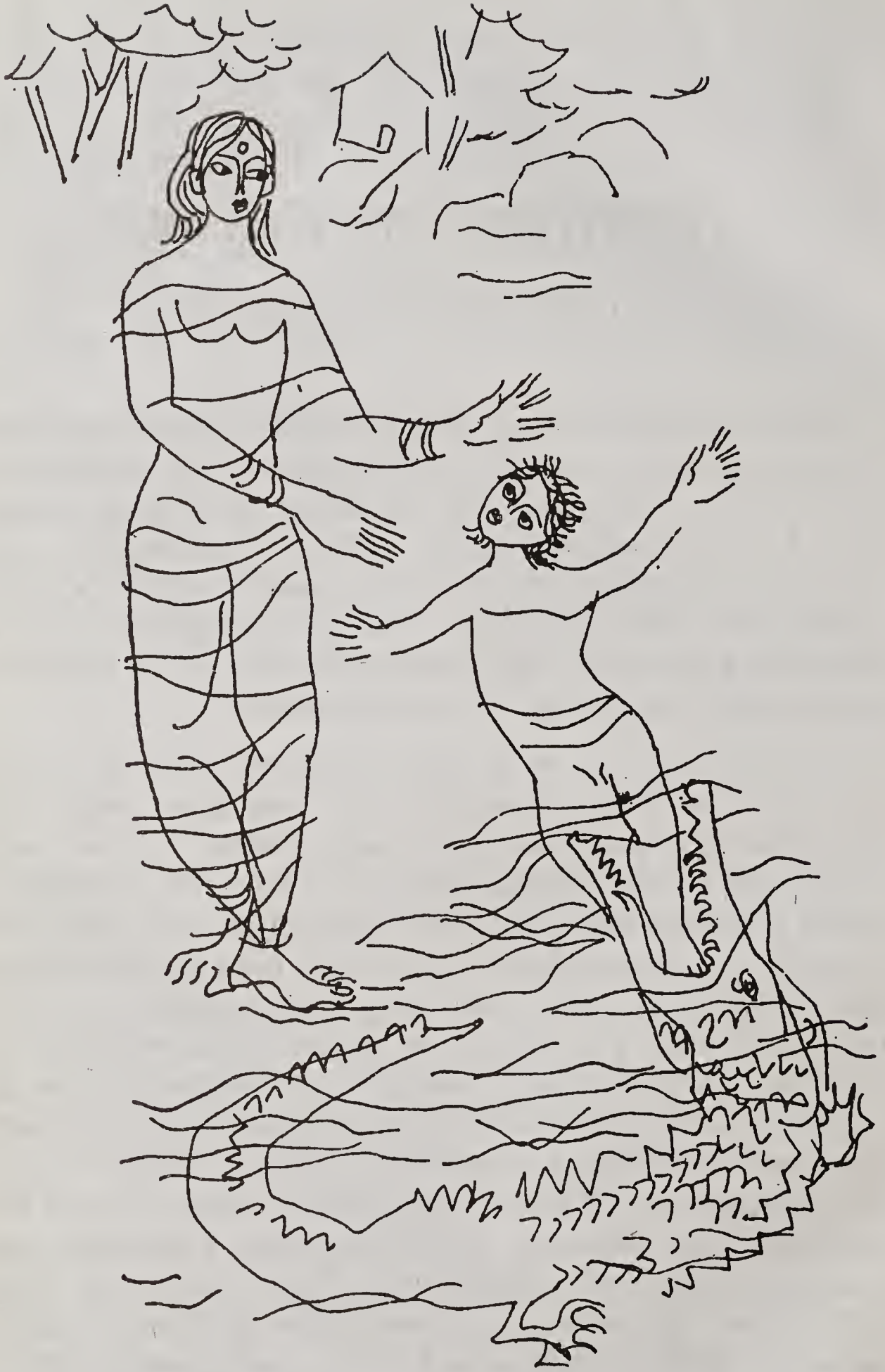
There God built a beautiful palace in the moon, and gave it to the rabbit, who had sacrificed himself for another. Since that time, the rabbit is seen in the moon.

FOOTPRINTS TO FOLLOW

(1) PARVATI'S COMPASSION

THE highly blessed Parvati, daughter of the Himalaya, performed severe austerities to obtain Lord Sankara as her husband. Sri Sankara was pleased and appeared before her. Parvati accepted him. After this Sankara disappeared. Parvati was sitting on a rock outside the hermitage. Meanwhile she heard the cries of a child in distress. The child was saying, "Alas, I am a child and have been caught by a crocodile. It will now devour me. I am the only son of my parents. Run, save me ! Alas, I am undone !"

On hearing the cry of the child, Parvati ran to the spot at once and saw that a very handsome child had been caught by a crocodile in the lake close by. On seeing Parvati it moved swiftly along with the child to the centre of the lake. The child was no doubt a brilliant one; but having been caught in the grip of the crocodile it was crying piteously. Parvati's heart was moved to see the child in distress. She said, "O king of crocodiles, the child is greatly afflicted; please let it go at once." The crocodile said, "Goddess, he who comes to me in the sixth quarter of the day, will be my food. The child has come here during this very period and therefore Brahma has sent it as my food. I cannot let it go." The Goddess said, "O king of crocodiles ! I bow to you. I have practised great asceticism on this top of the Himalayan range; please let it go in consideration of it." The crocodile said, "Please offer to me the austerity you have practised, then only shall I leave the child." Parvati replied, "O king of crocodiles, do not speak of this austerity. I offer to you all the merit earned by me throughout my lifetime. Please let this child go." No sooner had Parvati spoken thus than the body of the crocodile shone with the brilliance of the asceticism. His body waxed effulgent like the



midday sun. The crocodile said, "Goddess, what have you done? Just think over it. With what hardship did you practise this piece of asceticism and with what a high object! It is not proper for you

to forgo the fruit of such asceticism. Well, I am much satisfied with your devotion to the Brahmins and your service to the afflicted. I give you a boon—take back your asceticism and also this child." Thereupon the very devotional Parvati said, "O king of crocodiles, it was my duty to save this poor Brahmin child even at the cost of my life. Austerities could be practised again, but how could this child come back ? I have saved this child and offered you my asceticism after considering everything. Now I cannot take back what I have given. Only let this child go." On hearing this, the crocodile disappeared after leaving the child. Meanwhile Parvati decided to practise austerities again, feeling her previous achievement as having been lost. Thereupon Lord Sankara appeared before her and said, "Goddess, you will not have to practise austerity again; you have given it to Me alone. I was the child and so also the crocodile. I enacted this sport for the very purpose of witnessing the glory of your compassion and sacrifice. Look, as a result of your gift the value of your asceticism has now been enhanced a thousandfold and grown imperishable."

(2) A MOTHER'S HEART

ARJUNA produced before Draupadi Aswatthama, his preceptor's son, who had assassinated in cold blood her five sons while they were asleep. Draupadi looked at Aswatthama and her anger vanished all of a sudden. The mother's heart overflowed with compassion and Draupadi said to Arjuna, "My lord, set him at liberty. I do not seek his life. He is your preceptor's son. If he is killed, his mother—your preceptor's wife—will also be plunged into sorrow at her son's death, just as I am over the death of my five sons. My sons are not going to come back to life. I, therefore, do not want to make some other mother sorrowful just like myself merely for the sake of revenge. I forgive him. You too should do likewise."

Draupadi's forgiveness produced a great effect on the Pandavas. They set Aswatthama—the preceptor's son—at liberty. Feeling ashamed, Aswatthama left the place.

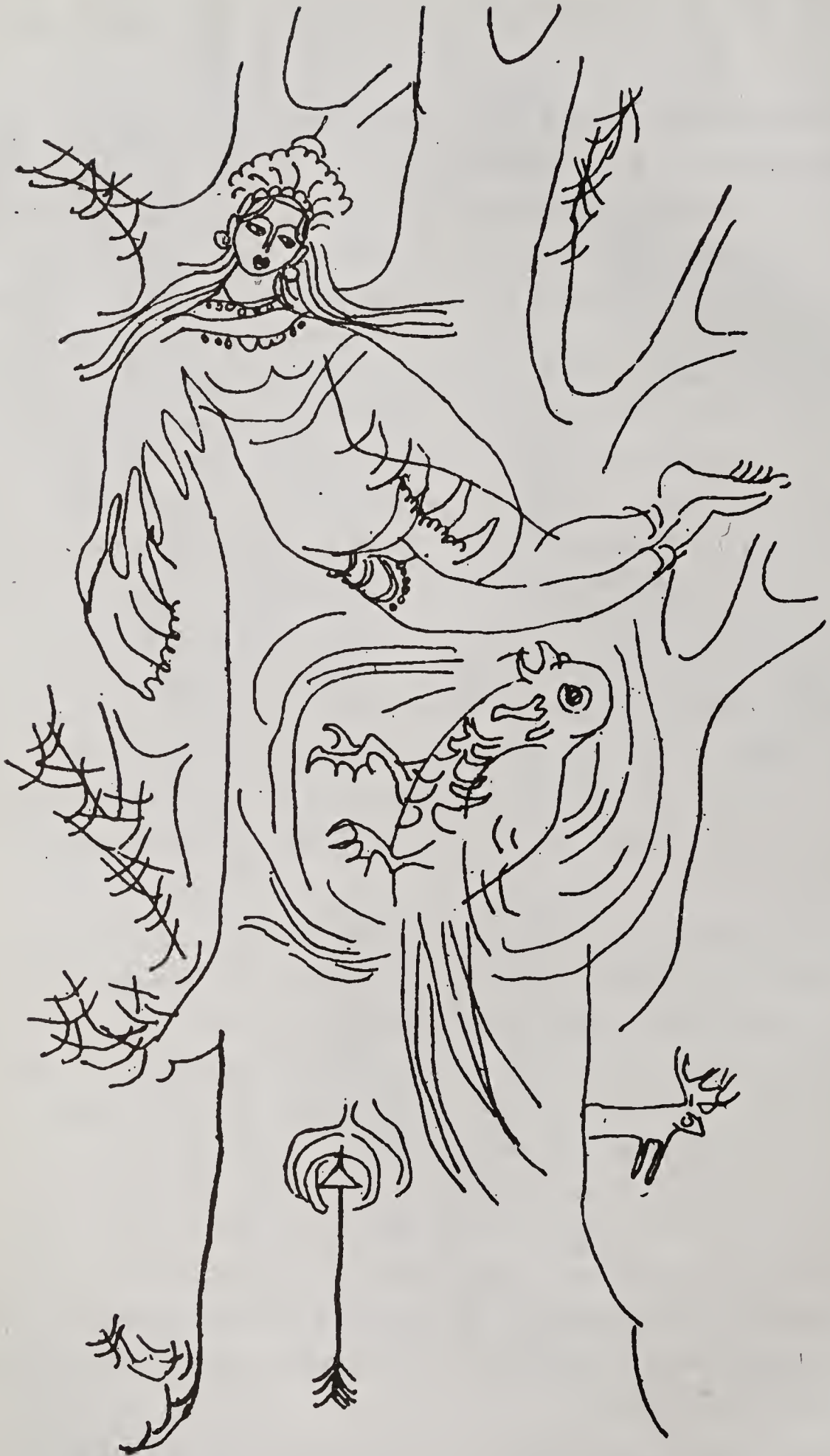


(3) A COMPANION IN JOY AND SORROW

A hunter discharged his poisoned arrow at the deer. Missing its mark the arrow pierced a big tree. The poison affected the whole tree; its leaves dropped and it began to dry up. There had lived a parrot a long time in a hollow of the tree. It had become very attached to the tree and so it did not leave the tree. It gave up coming outside the hollow and, for want of anything to eat and drink, was itself reduced to a skeleton. The pious parrot made up its mind to die along with its companion—the tree. Its generosity, fortitude, even-mindedness in pleasure and pain and spirit of self-sacrifice produced a great change in the atmosphere. Indra's attention was drawn towards it, and he appeared before the bird. The parrot recognized Indra. Thereupon Indra said, "Dear parrot, this tree has neither leaves nor fruits. No bird roosts on it now. There is a vast forest beside you, which contains thousands of beautiful trees laden with fruits and flowers, as also innumerable habitable hollows covered with leaves. This tree is now about to die; it can no longer bear fruits and flowers. Considering all this, why should you not move to some other green tree, leaving this withered one?"

The pious parrot replied in words expressive of commiseration for the tree, "O king of gods, I was born and brought up on this tree; I also learnt some good things here, and it always looked after me as a child. It gave me sweet fruits to eat and also protected me from the attacks of my enemies. Now where should I go for my pleasure, leaving it in such a pitiable plight? Having enjoyed pleasure with it, I shall endure sufferings too with it. It is a matter of great delight to me. Being the lord of the gods, why are you giving me this wrong advice? When it was strong and prosperous, I supported my life under its shelter and now when it is powerless and ruined, how is it possible that I should go away leaving it to its fate?"

Indra was very pleased to hear these sweet and attractive words full of affection from the parrot. He was moved with pity and said, "Parrot, ask any boon of me." The parrot replied, "As you are disposed to confer a boon on me, please grant that this



tree, so dear to me, turns as fresh and green as before." Indra watered the tree with a shower of nectar. The tree again bore new branches, leaves and fruits. It attained its full bloom as before

and the parrot too ascended to heaven on the expiry of its life as a reward for this ideal behaviour.

(4) TEST OF EVEN-MINDEDNESS

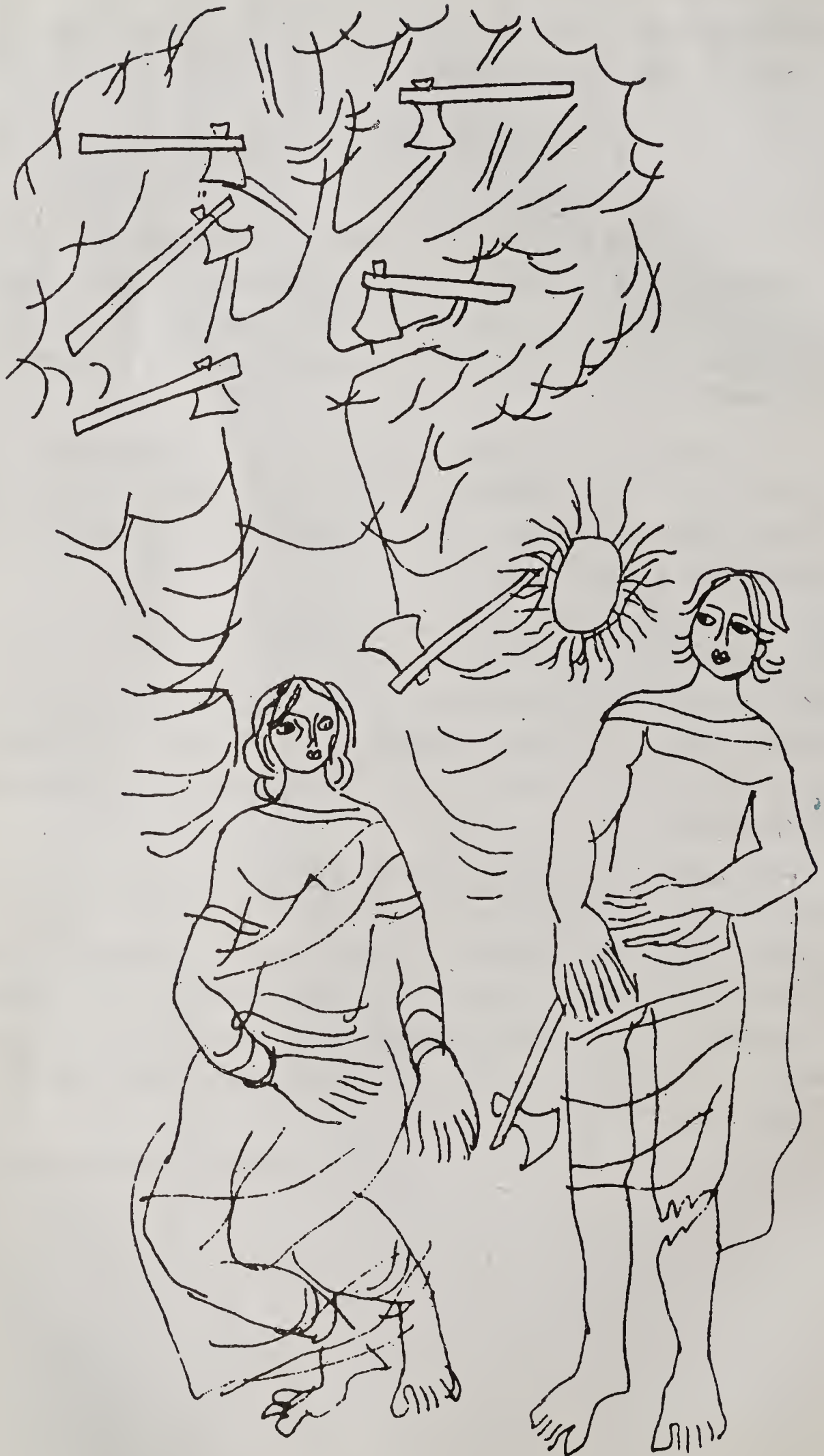
"CHILD ! How is it that your loin-cloth has blood-spots ?" "Oh Mother ! I tried to scratch my leg with the axe." Lifting the loin-cloth, the mother saw that a part of the skin and flesh of the leg had been scrapped off. Namadeva was walking as if nothing had happened to him.

"You are very foolish," Namadeva's mother said. "Does anyone try an axe on his leg ? If the leg breaks, one would become lame and if the wound gets septic or gangrenous, the leg may even have to be amputated."

"In that case even the tree should feel hurt with the axe. The other day I had peeled off some bark of a Palasa tree with the axe and brought it as demanded by you. It occurred to me that I should peel off the skin of my leg too, to see how I feel. Mother ! I did this in order to see if something had happened to the Palasa tree as well."

Namadeva's mother recollected that she had sent him the other day to bring some Palasa bark for a decoction. Namadeva's mother started crying and said, "Dear Namu! It seems that you are destined to become a great Sadhu. The trees and other creatures have also life like human beings. As we feel pain on being hurt, they do likewise." In due course this very Namu became the famous devotee Namadeva.

—Translated from the **KALYAN**



THE WHITE BABY ELEPHANT¹

ONCE upon a time, when Brahmadata was reigning in Benares; there was a village of carpenters not far from the city. Five hundred carpenters used to live there. It was their custom to go in a boat up the river to a forest to cut down logs as material for houses; then they would prepare the logs for one-storied and two-storied houses, and would there and then make marks on the wood for the pillars and so on; afterwards these beams would be brought down to the river. When the boat was loaded they would go downstream to the city and sell wood to people who wanted to build houses, and when they had got their money they would go back again to the same place up the river to gather more logs for houses.

Earning their living in this way, once they made a camp with a stockade round it, and went out to cut down trees. Now, not far off, an elephant trod upon a splinter of acacia wood, and the splinter pierced his foot, causing great pain as the foot became inflamed and matter collected. The poor elephant was mad with pain, but hearing the sound of the cutting of wood, he thought to himself: "If I go to these carpenters I shall get some relief"; and he hopped off on three legs towards the carpenters, and coming up to them, stopped near them.

As soon as they saw his swollen foot and the splinter fixed in it, the carpenters cut a ring around the splinter with a sharp axe and tied a rope to it and pulled it out; then they cleaned out the matter from the wound, and washed it with warm water,

¹ Translated from the Pali Buddhist Jataka Tales, Vol. II, No. 6, Ed. Fausboll.

medicated it with suitable herbs, and in a short time the wound healed.

When the elephant felt better he thought: "My life has been saved by these carpenters; I must make them some return."

Thenceforward, he helped the men to uproot the trees and when the trees were cut down he rolled them over for them, and he fetched them their axes and other implements, wrapping his trunk round them as if he were grim death ! At meal times each of the five hundred carpenters gave him a morsel.

Now this elephant, who had a son, all white—a royal baby elephant!—thought: "I am getting old, I must give my son to these men to do my work, and then I must go away."

Having thus made up his mind, he entered the forest without telling the men, and bringing back his son said to them : "This baby elephant is my son; you have saved my life, so I give him to you as your doctor's fee; henceforward he will do service." Addressing his son, he said : "From now you must do whatever work I did."

He thus gave his son to the men, and disappeared into the forest.

From that time the young elephant obeyed the commands of the men, and did everything that had to be done, and the men fed him with five hundred morsels. When work was over he would go down to the river and play about there and then come back; and the carpenters' children used to hang on to his trunk and tail and legs, and play with him in the water and on land.

Now the King of Benares heard of this white elephant and as white elephants were extremely rare, he desired to have him. So he came in boats with his ministers to the carpenters' village. The elephant was playing in the river when he heard the sound of the drums; as soon as he heard the noise he ran back to the carpenters. The carpenters went up to the King and said: "Your Majesty, if it was a question of timber, why should you have come yourself; would it not have been sufficient to send some one for it?"

The King replied, "I assure you, my men, I have not come for timber, but for this elephant."

"Your Majesty, be pleased to accept him and take him with you," said the men.

But the young elephant would not move!

"I say," said the King to him, "what do you wish me to do?"

"O my lord," replied the elephant, "be pleased to order my price to be given to the carpenters."

"That's all right," said the King, and ordered his men to make a pile of a million rupees between the elephant's trunk and his tail.

But even then the elephant would not go ! So the King ordered to give also to the carpenters two pieces of long cloth each, to their wives cloth to make dresses out of, and to the children who had played with the elephant a special treat.

Then the elephant turned to go, and looking back again and again at the carpenters, their wives and their children, went away with the King.

The King took him to the city; the city and all the elephants' stalls were decorated, and the young elephant was covered with beautiful trappings. The King then anointed him and set him apart to be ridden by himself alone; he also treated him as a companion, indeed as though he were the King himself, giving him half his kingdom.

From the time the elephant was his, the King held all the power in India in his hand. As the time went on the Bodhisattva (the future Buddha) was about to be born as the son of the King's chief queen; but the King died before his son was born. Now, if the elephant had known that the King was dead, his heart would have broken there and then; and no one told him the sad news, but all waited on him as usual.

Now the King of the Kosalas, whose kingdom adjoined hearing the news, exclaimed, "The country is without a leader!" and marching thither with a great army, surrounded the capital.



The citizens shut the gates and sent the following message to the Kosala King : "We are expecting the birth of the King's heir; if in seven days' time a prince is born, we will fight with you; but if it is not a prince, then we will give you the kingdom; come after seven days," "Good," said the Kosala King, and agreed. On the

seventh day a prince was born, and from that day the citizens fought with the Kosala King. But they had no leader in the battle, and while fighting, their army, great as it was, retreated little by little. The ministers then said to the queen : "If we retreat in this way, we are afraid that our army will be defeated; the royal elephant, the King's friend, does not know that the King is dead, nor that his son is born, nor that the Kosala King is waging war on us. Let us tell him."

The queen assented, and had the prince dressed and placed on a silk cushion; she then descended from the palace and, surrounded by her ministers, went to the elephants' stalls, and laid the little prince at the feet of the white elephant, and said :

"Sir, your friend is dead. We did not announce that fact to you, as we were afraid your heart would break. This is your friend's son. The King of the Kosalas has come and surrounded the city, and is waging war on this my son. Our army is in retreat; either kill my son, or else regain for him his kingdom."

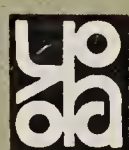
Then the elephant fondled the little prince with his trunk, and lifted him to his forehead and cried and wept; then lifting down the little prince laid him in the queen's arms, and exclaimed, "I will seize this Kosala King," and came out of his stall.

The ministers thereupon put on him his armour and ornaments, and going to the city gates opened them and marched out. The elephant rushed out of the city, trumpeting loudly and frightening the enemy's army and, rushing on the enemy's camp, broke it up.

Then he grasped the Kosala King by the top-knot of his hair, and brought him and cast him at the feet of the little prince. - Many rushed to kill the King, but the elephant forbade it, and said to him : "Have a care henceforward not to get the idea into your head that our prince is only a little boy !" Thus warning him, he set him free.

From that time all the power in India came into the hands of the Bodhisattva, and no enemy was able to rise up against him. At the end of the seventh year, the Bodhisattva was anointed King, and after reigning justly all his life entered heaven on his death.

This is a collection of stories presented with charming simplicity by Bhikshu Chaman Lal-an author, lecturer, world traveller and a missionary of peace. The stories presented in this book are full of wisdom. They tell us what we can learn from nature and what tolerance and love can bring to humanity. Every story imparts certain useful lesson and invests every reader with indomitable courage.



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